SARDAR VALLABHBHA ATEL

VOL. I

140

The original in Gujarati

by

NARHARI D. PARIKH

மண்டல ஊரக வளர்ச்சி நிறுவனம்
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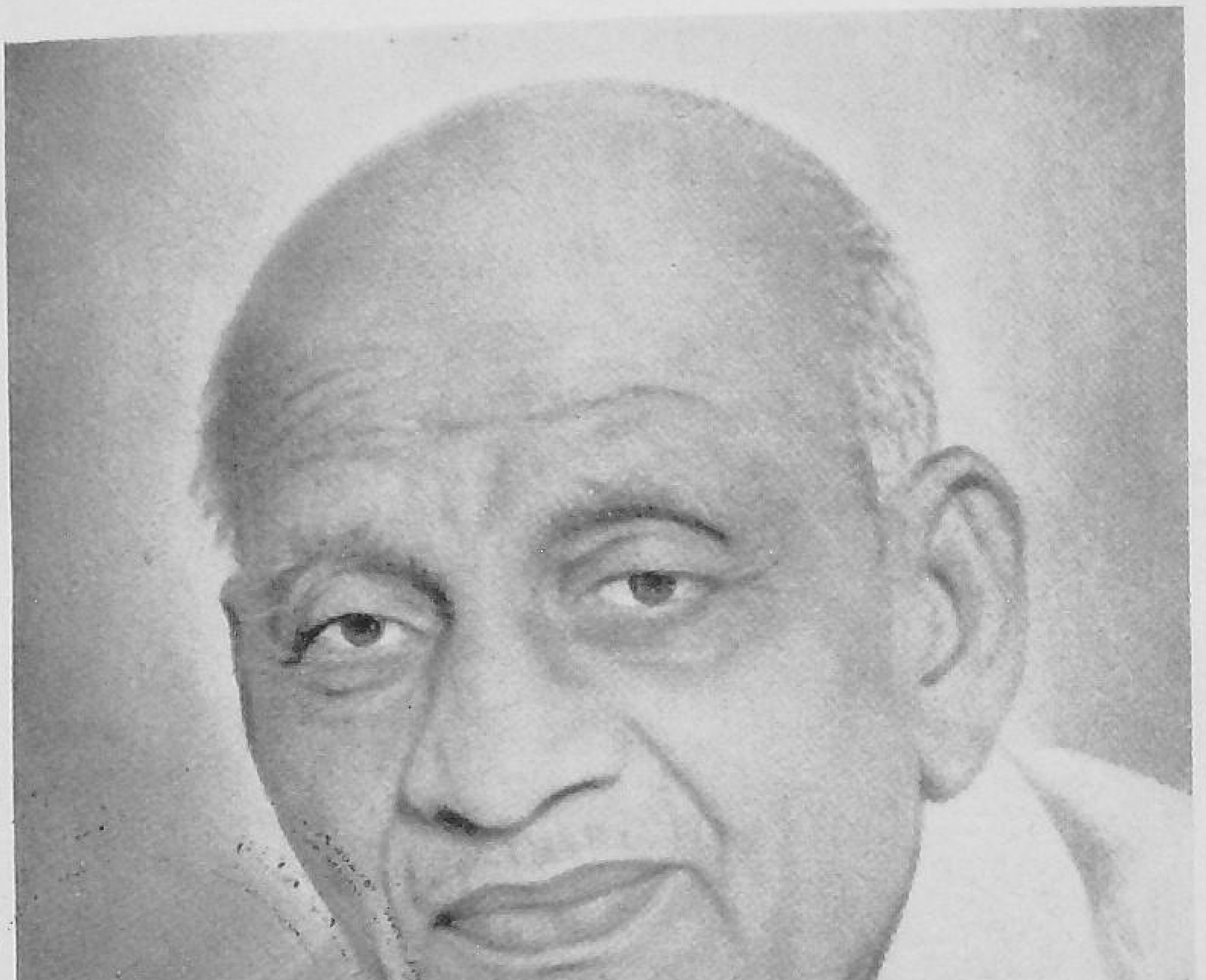
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First Edition, Copies 3,000, October, 1953
Rupees Six

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Printed and Published by Jivanji Dahyabhai Desai
Navajivan Press, Ahmedabad

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

To the Gujarati edition of the first part of Sardar Patel's biography by Shri Narhari Parikh I as publisher had appended a rather long submission. As he has said in his preface the period of the Sardar's life covered by this Part I is mostly associated with the history of the fashioning of the political life of Gujarat by the Sardar under Gandhiji's inspiration. This necessitated a rather long narration of the circumstances in which the Sardar had worked. I have not deemed it necessary for the English edition. I had besides tried to clear certain misimpressions about the Sardar current in Gujarat. That too is not necessary for this edition. I have therefore given this short note as publisher mainly to express my sense of gratitude to a friend of ours and an admirer of the Sardar who undertook to render the Gujarati of Part I into English as a labour of love and has done it successfully as will be seen by the readers. I must confess I was rather worried after I announced that the Sardar's life would soon be made available in English. Translation from one language into another is in one way more difficult to obtain than independent writing in only one. It presupposes an equal command of two languages by the same person. Such persons are hard to find. The friend who has come to my assistance in my predicament deserves my gratitude in full measure.

Sardar Vallabhbhai Zaverbhai Patel is one of those who along with Gandhiji fought the battle for freedom, won it and have contributed immensely to the construction of modern independent India. As Pandit Jawaharlal has said about Gandhiji it can be said about the Sardar too that he was fast becoming a legendary figure in the public mind here and abroad. I hope this part I of his biography written by a colleague of his will bring to the English reading public a correct and vivid picture of the personality of the man who was among the foremost few of the makers of modern India.

JIVANJI DESAI

Ahmedabad,
September, 1953

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

The Sardar once said in casual conversation: "I had once thought Mahadev would possibly write my life along with Bapu's. He had made ample notes for the work and as he was not only present on all important occasions but was also active in all of them he had in his possession all the necessary and full details. But God willed otherwise. Indeed, His ways are inscrutable." Mahadevbhai was of course the fittest person to undertake the writing of the Sardar's biography. I have ventured to undertake it in his absence because I have felt it my duty to carry on further according to my limited capacity the work he was not allowed to finish. But I have neither his marvellous natural gift of literary art nor his enchanting style. Because I am fully conscious of my lack of both I have avoided an attempt to present a biography wherein naturally a full estimate of the life of the subject as also of the impress of his work and personality on his own times and on the future is presented. What I have done is merely to arrange and present in an orderly and the best manner I could the material for the Sardar's life that was available to me. I have besides attempted to give a faithful picture of the significant events of his life. If the collection I have made serves the need of some able biographer with the necessary literary talent I would feel amply rewarded for my labour.

I must also confess that I had not even dreamt of making such an attempt. But ever since we were all released from jail in 1945 Shri Manibahen repeatedly asked me as to who would write her Bapu's life. She insisted that I should do it. Had Mahadevbhai lived, she told me, he would surely have done it. But unfortunately for all of us, he is no more. I would argue with her that I had not the art of writing such a life. She would counter me by saying that it was my duty to write as best as I could; that she

had all the files and relevant papers with her; and that she could not take the risk of entrusting anyone but me with that precious material. I had to yield. She handed over to me all the material she had with her. Indeed, she went to the length of handing over to me for the purpose without my asking for them her personal diaries wherein she had written matters which may be considered strictly private and personal to her and not meant for other eyes. Manibahen's persuasion and sweet insistence have been mainly responsible in inducing me to undertake this task.

Another important factor that has induced me to accept the undertaking is the love the Sardar has for me and the trust he has ever placed in me. I knew the Sardar since the year 1914 though it is likely he did not know me then. Before our mutual acquaintance ripened into friendship I had occasion to meet him once or twice in connection with my practice as a lawyer. I joined the Satyagraha Ashram as a member in the year 1917 and the Sardar too so far as I remember came in closer contact with Gandhiji during those very days. Since then the Sardar began and has continued to treat me as a younger brother. I have had the great privilege of working with him in the national cause as a trusted co-worker during our close acquaintance of the subsequent thirty-three years. I must confess that during these years occasions arose when I hurt his feelings. Either because I could not well understand what he meant or because I could not accept what he said on account of the different opinion I held on the particular occasion, it has sometimes happened that I disregarded his advice. But the Sardar never permitted these incidents to lessen his regard or sympathy for me in the least little measure. A belief that he is by nature so constituted that he cannot brook opposition and that he never rests till he has destroyed root and branch any one who has been foolhardy enough to oppose him is current among those who have not been able to know him well. My own experience has been different. It is true he does everything in his power to foil the activities of anyone who seeks to injure the interests of the

nation or to serve his personal interests in the name of national service. But he has never harassed anyone who holds a different opinion from him and works for it. On the contrary he has shown himself ever ready to appreciate all honest difference in opinion.

The Sardar enjoys the reputation of being a man of iron. For those who seek to thwart him in his public activities or for those wrong sort of persons who have wormed themselves into his party this description of the Sardar is possibly true. But in personal relations and dealing I have seen him act with such gentleness and with such a tendency to tolerate and 'let go' that one may be led into questioning his reputation of being a man of iron will. In public and national affairs he can be harder than steel but he is softer than a flower in personal and private relations. It is possible, superficial observers have not been able to appreciate this tenderness which resides deep down in his being because he avoids making outward demonstrations of it.

The Sardar's feeling of sympathy for those whom he has accepted as his own is something remarkable. He is always eager to share their joys and sorrows and to run to their help in their various difficulties. He has the uncanny gift of finding out the measure of a person almost at first sight, sorts out the wrong types, knows definitely as to what work can be taken from those of them who have passed his test, assigns various tasks to them and takes work from them. He deliberates thoroughly before selecting a person for a particular task but once having put him to it trusts him fully, never interferes in his work and gives to him all the assistance he needs liberally and unreservedly. This has been my personal experience. This is the reason why the Sardar has been able to gather around himself a band of loyal workers and comrades. Excepting Gandhiji the Sardar has perhaps collected around him a larger number of such true men than any of our national leaders. Gandhiji besides being an able general was by temperament an ideal teacher. That was why he was able to train men for his

purpose wherever he worked. The Sardar is not a teacher; he is only a very able general. He has not been known to have fashioned or trained new men for his army, nor has he been known to have attempted to give more training to those who were available to him. He has merely utilized to the maximum the capacities of the men whom he found ready at hand. This is not to say that men have not developed or progressed under him. In fact if one wanted to progress and develop one's capacities on his own he got from the Sardar all the necessary liberty, opportunity and assistance. Because of this unique skill in collecting an army of soldiers who were ready to act on his orders and because of the tact to take from each of them work suited to his or her capacity the Sardar was not handicapped for want of able workers and was eminently successful in the Satyagraha campaigns at Nagpur, Borsad and Bardoli and in organizing the work of flood-relief in Gujarat in the year 1927. The key to the Sardar's success in different fields of public activities is to be found in his capacity to take the right decision at the right moment without hesitation or loss of time and to find the right sort of persons to assist himself.

Shri Ganesh Vasudev Mavlankar has carefully gone through the whole of the manuscript of the book with a view to avoid any mistakes regarding facts creeping into it. He also suggested some very important corrections. Some chapters regarding which I had not been able to collect full information or regarding the facts and details of which I was not quite sure have been read by the Sardar himself at my request. In some of them he suggested significant additions. I am thus in a position to say that the facts presented here are all authentic and beyond question.

Some useful information about the early life of the Sardar I have secured from the wife of his close friend the late Shri Kashibhai Shamalbhai of Nadiad. Some facts of the period of the Sardar's residence in Borsad have been obtained from a very old practising lawyer of the place

Shri Fulabhai Narsibhai. The Sardar's younger brother Shri Kashibhai Zaverbhai Patel rendered useful help in securing old facts about the family. Shri Manibhai Chaturbhai Shah an old co-worker of the Sardar in the Ahmedabad Municipality and once its President has supplied the facts about the Sardar's municipal career. Dr. C. J. Ghiya, President of the Surat Municipality and Shri Viththaldas Purushottamdas Desai an ex-President of the Nadiad Municipality have supplied the necessary information and facts from the records of their respective Municipalities. The facts about the Kheda Satyagraha have been taken from the book *Khedani Ladat* written by my elder brother Shri Shankarlal Dwarkadas Parikh. Some facts about the Borsad Satyagraha Movement have been obtained from Shri Ramabhai Patel a pleader of Borsad. Shri Manibahen has secured by correspondence with old co-students of the Sardar some useful information about his student days. I thank all the friends, men and women, who have rendered me assistance in my work.

I have been able to get the largest amount of information and details of fact, however, from *Veer Vallabhbhai* and *Ek Dharmayuddha*, two small but interesting books by Shri Mahadevbhai, his articles in the weekly, the *Navajivan*, his very informative and equally interesting book *Bardoli Satyagrahano Itihas* and from his stray letters. In truth what I have done is, as I have said earlier in this preface, merely to arrange and present in an orderly manner the large store of material he had collected and left to us.

This part I of the Sardar's biography covers the period from his birth to the Lahore Session of the Indian National Congress held in the year 1929. Most of his life depicted in it is associated with the awakening of the political consciousness and the development of the political life of Gujarat. One may as well say that the political life of the Province of Gujarat has been entirely fashioned by the Sardar during the past thirty-two years on the strength of the inspiration he received from Gandhiji. It is therefore

but natural that the entire history of that development is covered by this book. The feeling that the young men and women of Gujarat to whom the future provides immense opportunity for national service in various fields of life will derive inspiration from this book and that I am rendering some service to them has constantly remained with me while I was writing it. Indeed, I have all along felt thankful that it was my privilege to do so.

Harijan Ashram, NARHARI PARIKH
Sabarmati,
30-9-'50

CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
	PUBLISHER'S NOTE — Jivanji Desai	iii
	AUTHOR'S PREFACE	v
I	PARENTS	3
II	EARLY STUDIES	8
III	LAWYER	12
IV	IN ENGLAND	18
V	BARRISTER	21
VI	MUNICIPAL ADMINISTRATION	26
VII	BEGINNING OF CONSTRUCTIVE WORK IN THE MUNICIPALITY	36
VIII	THE GUJARAT SABHA	41
IX	KHEDA SATYAGRAHA — 1	48
X	KHEDA SATYAGRAHA — 2	69
XI	LABOUR STRIKE IN AHMEDABAD	90
XII	RECRUITMENT	94
XIII	ANTI-ROWLATT ACT AGITATION	97
XIV	NON-CO-OPERATION	107
XV	NON-CO-OPERATION THROUGH THE MUNICIPALITY	129
XVI	AFTER THE MUNICIPALITY WAS SUSPENDED	140
XVII	THE AHMEDABAD CONGRESS — 1921	145
XVIII	CHAURI CHAURA INCIDENT AND GANDHIJI'S ARREST	150
XIX	AFTER GANDHIJI'S IMPRISONMENT	167
XX	THE FLAG STRUGGLE	189
XXI	THE OUTLAWS OF BORSAD AND PUNITIVE POLICE TAX	216
XXII	A PEEP INTO HIS DOMESTIC LIFE	249
XXIII	KAKINADA, GANDHIJI'S RELEASE AND THE SWARAJ PARTY	256
XXIV	AS MUNICIPAL PRESIDENT	268
XXV	THE FLOODS IN GUJARAT	280
XXVI	SATYAGRAHA OF BARDOLI	297
XXVII	POLITICAL SITUATION BETWEEN 1925 AND 1928	368
XXVIII	1929 — THE YEAR OF PREPARATION	375
XXIX	THE "COMPLETE INDEPENDENCE" RESOLUTION	394
	INDEX	399

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. SARDAR VALLABHBHAI . . Frontispiece
2. AS STUDENT AT NADIAD . . . 8
3. THE TWO BROTHERS AS BARRISTERS-AT-LAW 25
4. THE PRIDE OF GUJARAT . . . 185
5. LEADER OF NAGPUR AND BORSAD SATYAGRAHA 201
6. WITH THE FAMILY AT NADIAD, 1927 . 249
7. SUCCESSFUL LEADER OF BARDOLI . . 361
8. THE TWO BROTHERS WHO FOUGHT MANY BATTLES AND WON . . . 377

SARDAR VALLABHBHAI PATEL

CHAPTER I

PARENTS

Thirty year old lawyer Vallabhbhai was seated one day in an easychair in his office in Borsad smoking his *hukka*. Borsad, though a taluka * headquarters was only a little bigger than a village. The furniture was neither modern nor fashionable, but, for Borsad, it was good, and was well arranged. The floor was covered by a mat. There were a few chairs around the office table, and along one wall were a soft mattress and bolsters for those who preferred to sit on the floor in the Indian fashion. Everything was clean, neat and tidy. In a couple of book-cases there were books and files, and nowhere was there a speck of dust.

An elderly gentleman of good physique came in, walking erect. He was clad in white. Vallabhbhai immediately put aside his *hukka*, stood up and inquired : "Motakaka, † what has brought you here ? If you had sent me word, I would have come myself to Karamsad ; that would have also given me a chance of seeing Ladbai." "But," replied the old gentleman, "my work was in Borsad, so what was the point of asking you to come to Karamsad ? What is the good of your enjoying such high reputation and great influence in the district, if in spite of it, a warrant can be issued against our Maharaj,‡ and the police threaten to arrest him ?" Vallabhbhai exclaimed : "A warrant against the Maharaj ? He is the incarnation of God Purushottam and how dare anyone even think of arresting him who has the power of setting us free from the bonds of this world !" "I have received reliable information that a warrant has been issued against our Maharaj, because of a quarrel regarding

* Taluka or tahsil is an administrative unit of varying sizes, but usually extending over a few hundred square miles in area and containing a number of villages and one or two towns of population exceeding 10,000.

† Literally Great Uncle ; a form of addressing one's father or uncle or respected elders.

‡ Honorific for priest or Brahmin generally.

the possession of the temples at Vadtal and Bochasan. You must get it cancelled. If he is arrested, it will be an irreparable blow to our honour." "Why should it affect our honour? A warrant is issued for good reason, but I will inquire and do my best." Then, Vallabhbhai became a little more serious and said softly to his father: "You ought to give up these *sadhus*. Those who intrigue and quarrel and rush to courts of law are unlikely to be able to look after us in this world and still less in the next." "That is not what I came to discuss. All I want you to do is to have the warrant cancelled, if one has been issued." And having given this firm injunction the old man left the office.

Vallabhbhai's father was a staunch believer in the Swaminarayan cult. In his old age he used virtually to spend all his time in the Swaminarayan temple of his village, coming home only for the one meal he took every day. Right up to his death in March 1914 at the age of eightyfive, he used to go to Vadtal and offer his prayers at the main Swaminarayan Temple every month at full moon.

Until he was 17, Vallabhbhai had lived with his father in Karamsad and during that period, like his father, he used to fast twice a month, and on many an occasion the fast meant abstaining not merely from food, but even from water during a twentyfour hour period. Although he was brought up in the orthodox Swaminarayan atmosphere, he had no particular faith in its teachings. When he left Karamsad for further studies, he gave up all fasting and observance of other religious ritual. Vallabhbhai often used to speak with great admiration, of Sahajanand Swami and his disciples, and generally of the purity of life led by them and by the *sadhus* of former days. He recognized the great moral influence this cult had on the lives of thousands of men and women of all classes and in particular of the uneducated backward classes. But he felt that latterly the cult had lost its reformist zeal, and selfishness and greed had taken the place of the earlier austerity and purity of life among its priests.

His father, however, had come to seek his intervention on behalf of one of the head priests of this cult, Yajna-

purushottamji. This man was a learned and highly revered Brahmin, who had started the construction of a large new temple, and Sardar's father was one of his devotees. The new reformist group, which this learned priest formed, had started taking possession of the Swaminarayan temples in a number of villages, where they succeeded in persuading the majority of the local people to join them. This led to quarrels and fights between the two rival groups in many places, and in some cases, followers on each side took the matter to the criminal courts, urging the courts to call upon the other side to offer sureties of good behaviour. In one such case, the learned head priest had himself been named offender along with many other *sadhus* and disciples, and the matter came up before the resident Magistrate of Borsad. Because of his father's insistence, Vallabhbhai intervened in the matter and persuaded the two parties to agree to a peaceful settlement.

Vallabhbhai was a Lewa Patidar, a caste which is said to have come to Gujarat from the Punjab, and settled in twelve villages of which the six most important were, Nadiad, Vaso, Karamsad, Bhadran, Dharmaj and Sojitra. Karamsad was founded by one family and it is the descendants of that family who now populate the village and between them own all the land which was originally settled on the founder of the village. Vallabhbhai's father, Jhaverbhai, had inherited as his share only some ten acres of land. Partly because of this, and partly because he did not pay much attention to his land, Jhaverbhai's financial condition was not too good. But although poor he was of an independent temperament, and paid homage to none. He was from an early age religious-minded and spent a great deal of his time in the temple. There he could never remain stationary but paced up and down. Vallabhbhai had inherited this habit, for he too used to walk continuously as he talked, discussed or pondered over problems confronting him. Jhaverbhai kept aloof from the local village politics, and was held in high esteem as a religious man. If he had occasion to reproach anyone, he was listened to quietly and none

dared talk back to him. Vithalbhai, Vallabhbhai and his other brothers all called him "Motakaka".

It is said that Vallabhbhai's father had taken part in the Mutiny of 1857. Malharrao Holkar * is said to have arrested him eventually. The story runs that one day the Holkar was playing chess within sight of his prisoner, and that whenever he made a mistake, Jhaverbhai pointed it out to him and told him the right move. The Holkar was astonished at his knowledge of the game, and the prisoner soon became his friend.

Vallabhbhai's mother's family came from Nadiad and it was at Nadiad that he was born. They were somewhat better off than his father and so he and his brothers remained in Nadiad for long periods. Vallabhbhai studied English in a Nadiad school for three years, and during that period he lived in a club which he and some friends had organized. Vallabhbhai's mother, Ladbai, 18 years younger than his father, was gentle and friendly by nature. She was an expert house-keeper, and in spite of their slender resources, used to look after her guests well. She was incapable of quarrelling with anyone, and the spirit of service was so dominant in her that she tended to look upon her neighbours' work and troubles as her own. She had a remarkable capacity for winning the affection of all who came in contact with her. Until she died in 1932 at the age of about 85, she ran the house and cooked every meal. When Gandhiji's spinning wheel came, she adopted it at once, and thereafter whenever she had a spare moment, she sat down with it to spin.

Vallabhbhai had four brothers and one sister. The eldest and the youngest appeared to have inherited most of their mother's qualities, while the other three, those of their father. Vallabhbhai had inherited in very full measure his parents' self-control and their devotion to duty and to religion. He would repose the fullest trust in his colleagues, small or big, once they had earned his confidence. He was religious without observing any of the ritual and practices

* A founder of the Holkar dynasty of Indore.

which are usually associated with religion: he had complete control over his body and mind, and with such self-control, austerity in life and disinterested approach to men and their problems came easy to him. It is only if one has deep faith in an Invisible Power, and has an underlying current of religion, that one is inspired to render selfless service and to work unceasingly in public interest, regardless of cost to oneself. Vallabhbhai's religious-mindedness was thus not of the orthodox type and perhaps it would not be inappropriate to call him in the language of the Puranas, a Rajarshi.* His religious faith, his self-control, his sacrifices were akin to those of a warrior, not of a saint. That is why the popular mind instinctively bestowed on him the title of Sardar. Determination, firmness, infinite ability to bear physical pain cheerfully, utter fearlessness, all these qualities were developed to a high degree in Vallabhbhai; he must have inherited them from his father and they grew in him with age and experience. It would seem also that he was a born organizer and administrator; and, as was apparent in his later years, a natural diplomat and statesman. Who can say that these characteristics, too, were not inherited? As Vallabhbhai's activities and experience expanded, these qualities innate in him developed and found expression.

Vallabhbhai had a natural ability to bear great physical pain, and many instances of it can be quoted. Once he had a boil. The only remedy known to the villagers was to have the boil punctured by the local barber. The barber was accordingly called, and when he hesitated to carry out the operation with the help of a red-hot iron rod, the Sardar reproached him and taking the rod from his hand, put it on the boil quickly. Vallabhbhai had acquired from his parents a passion for cleanliness and tidiness. He insisted upon tidiness in everything. Wherever he went, he had a way of noticing anything untidy or out of place, and having it put right.

* A royal sage or a man of the Kshatriya caste who, by his pious life and austere devotion, comes to be regarded as a sage or *rishi*.

CHAPTER II

EARLY STUDIES

Vallabhbhai was born in a family of agriculturists in which there was no atmosphere of learning. He himself did not know the date of his birth ; it is possible that his mother knew it according to the Indian Calendar, but she certainly did not know the year or the English date. It has been customary to regard 31st October, 1875, as Vallabhbhai's birthday and that is based on his Matriculation Examination certificate. Vallabhbhai used to say that in the examination hall he filled in his date of birth according to his own fancy. For the purposes of the election of 1937 in which the Congress participated, it became necessary for the first time to ascertain his date of birth, and that was taken from his Matriculation certificate.

When he was a primary school student, he had a far better knowledge of the neighbouring fields and villages than he had of his school books. His father took him out every morning to the fields to make him learn the tables and to teach him small arithmetic problems. Until he was 17 or 18, Vallabhbhai lived in Karamsad and learnt to do a certain amount of work in the field. He studied up to the 7th Gujarati standard in Karamsad. It has not been possible to ascertain much more regarding his early school days, beyond an interesting story which he used to relate about this period. One of the teachers in the lower standards used to answer questions put to him with an abuse followed by the remark, " Why do you ask me ? Learn for yourself." This expression became as it were, a key to Vallabhbhai's life. Whatever he learnt he learnt through his own efforts, and until Gandhiji became his teacher, his life developed along lines laid down by himself and without anyone's assistance or guidance. And even when he accepted Gandhiji as his teacher, he did so without sacrificing his personal independence.

As Student at Nadiad

The one great ambition of the headmaster of the Karamsad school was that every student who passed the 7th standard should continue his studies further in order to qualify as a senior trained teacher. But right from his childhood, even though he received scarcely any encouragement or assistance, Vallabhbhai wanted to be a great man, and in those days to become a great man meant to become a lawyer or a barrister. It is possible that immediately after finishing his Gujarati studies, he did not have any definite ideas of becoming a lawyer or a barrister. He was, however, quite determined to study English, and there was no English school in his village. His elder brother, Vithalbhai, had already been sent to an English school in Nadiad and his father did not like to burden the boys' maternal uncle further by sending his second boy there also. Fortunately, about that time a private English school was opened in the village and education up to the 3rd English standard was given in it. He joined that school and he must have been about 17 years of age when he graduated from the 3rd standard. Thereafter he went to Petlad where there was an English school which taught up to the 5th standard. Half a dozen students joined and rented a house. Each would take from his home every Sunday enough food to last a week, and they took turns at cooking. Such was Vallabhbhai's poverty and simplicity during the period of his student days.

After finishing the 5th standard he went to Nadiad for further studies.

Boys at that time used to be encouraged to read English and to learn passages by heart. This appealed to Vallabhbhai who liked reading English books. Learning passages from these books by heart came easy to him. His knowledge of English was said to have been good, and according to his fellow students, he was active in organizing debates and making speeches in English. Although while at school he appeared fond of English, later he did not make any effort to develop his English beyond what was necessary for practical purposes. His fellow students regarded him as their leader. His 6th standard teacher, who was a Parsi, was a very strict disciplinarian and made rather liberal

use of his cane. One day he fined a student and when the boy did not bring his fine turned him out of the class. Vallabhbhai thought that this teacher should be taught a lesson and so he persuaded all his fellow students immediately to leave the class. He followed this up by persuading the boys of the whole school to go on strike and even organized picketing to prevent any of them from attending classes. He took possession of the *dharmashala,** made arrangements for drinking water etc. and there the strikers spent the three days that the strike lasted. The headmaster of the school was a shrewd person. He called Vallabhbhai and assured him that in future no student would be punished excessively or unjustly. On the basis of this assurance, a settlement was quickly reached.

Another incident relates to a teacher, who was running a sort of business in paper, pencils, exercise books etc. This teacher used to compel boys of his class to buy these articles from him. When Vallabhbhai came to hear of this, he organized an effective boycott of the teacher with the result that the teacher had to give up this sideline. In addition to such small fights, Vallabhbhai used to take part in activities of a more public character. A teacher of the school stood for Municipal election. Vallabhbhai organized all the boys of the school to work in support of this teacher. The opposing candidate was so confident of his success that he rather unwisely announced that if he lost, he would shave off his moustache. Vallabhbhai took up this challenge and worked with such zeal and skill that his master was elected with a big majority. As soon as this news was announced, Vallabhbhai collected some 50 fellow students and a barber and proceeded to the defeated candidate's house to ask him to carry out his part of the bargain !

It was finally in 1897 that he passed his Matriculation Examination from the Nadiad High School, and he was then almost 22. He was immediately faced with the problem of deciding what he should do next. He had been turning

* A publicly owned traveller's rest-house.

over ambitious projects in his mind ever since his childhood. In a speech in 1921 during the non-co-operation days, he gave an account of how his mind then worked :

> "Shri Mohanlal has said in introducing me to you that once upon a time I used to imitate the British and their ways closely. That is quite true. It is also true that sports used to take up whatever spare time I had. I used to think then that for our unfortunate country, it was the best policy to imitate the foreigner. I had been taught to think that the people of our country were of poor character and unworthy, and that it was only the foreigner ruling over us who was good and had the ability to improve our condition. We could only be slaves. This was the sort of poison which was being instilled in our minds. I was anxious to go overseas to see the people of England who, living 7,000 miles away, were able to rule us for so long. I came from a middle class family. My father lived a humble and pious life and died in the temple he loved. He had no means to enable me to fulfil my ambitions. I was told that only if I could get 7 to 10 thousand rupees, I would be able to proceed to England. No one was likely to give me so much money. I realized finally that if I wanted to go to England, I had to earn the money myself. I, therefore, studied very earnestly for my Law Examination and resolved firmly to save sufficient money for a visit to England."

It appears that the Sardar's decision to become a lawyer was influenced also by the fact that it was the cheapest course of study and the most promising profession. His aim was modest : to become a district pleader. He could not afford a university education. It would take six years to be an LL.B. and he did not think it advisable to spend so much time on studies. He was getting on in age and he was keen on passing his examinations as quickly as possible and on proceeding to England. In those days, one could prepare for the district pleaders' examination at home with books borrowed from local lawyers. He passed the district pleaders' examination at the end of three years.

CHAPTER III

LAWYER

Several well-established lawyers, including his brother Vithalbhai, invited Vallabhbhai to work in partnership with them, but he preferred to set up independently, and selected Godhra for the purpose. Godhra did not offer much scope, but it is possible that Vallabhbhai thought that as his elder brother, Vithalbhai, had been practising in Godhra since 1895 and had only recently moved to Borsad, he himself would have a good start, with the help of his brother's friends and contacts. However that may be, so slender were his resources at the time that he had to borrow money in order to open a modest office and to set up house.

As ill luck would have it, soon after Sardar went to Godhra, it was visited by plague ! A friend of his was among its victims. Vallabhbhai nursed him, but the attack proved fatal. On his return from the funeral, Vallabhbhai discovered that he, too, had been infected. Calmly he arranged for his wife to go to Karamsad, despite her reluctance, and himself went to Nadiad, where he remained alone until he fully recovered.

After 2 years in Godhra, Vallabhbhai moved to Borsad in 1902. This early change in his plans was connected with his brother, Vithalbhai. The resident 1st Class Magistrate, the Mamlatdar and the 1st Class Sub-Judge of Borsad were annoyed with him as he had been instrumental in the appointment of a Commission to enquire into complaints for bribery and corruption against a former Sub-Judge. They were anxious to revenge themselves on him and were looking for some pretext. Vallabhbhai, hearing of this, decided to settle in Borsad. He lived separately from Vithalbhai and outwardly conducted himself in such a way that all the officers thought that the two brothers were not on friendly terms. Indeed, people used to be greatly intrigued at seeing them appearing at times on opposing sides. In a very short

time Vallabhbhai established his position. In one case in which Vallabhbhai was appearing, the Mamlatdar had been implicated and the resident Magistrate who was his friend wanted to help him out. They had, therefore, no alternative but to seek Vallabhbhai's assistance. This gave Vallabhbhai the opportunity he had been waiting for. Vallabhbhai declined at first but yielded finally only when persuaded to do so by Vithalbhai. Vallabhbhai was able to help the Mamlatdar, and the latter and his friends soon gave up their unfriendly attitude towards Vithalbhai.

Of the districts of Bombay Kheda enjoyed the dubious honour at the time for the largest number of criminal offences, and within the Kheda District itself, the highest number of such offences took place in Borsad taluka. The Government was compelled to appoint for the taluka a special resident 1st Class Magistrate to try first class offences. For the more important trials in this court, for the prosecution, the Government Pleader from Ahmedabad used ordinarily to appear, while in almost all such cases, Vallabhbhai used to be engaged for the defence. And he was so often successful in securing acquittal for the accused that the Government Pleader and the police officers were seriously alarmed. They felt that so long as Vallabhbhai was there to appear for the defence, the chances were that they would probably fail. They recommended to the Government, therefore, that the resident Magistrate's court should be transferred from Borsad to Anand. Anand was a railway junction and it was thought that it would be more convenient to all concerned. This recommendation was accepted and the court was moved to Anand. But as Vallabhbhai, too, followed the court and moved from Borsad to Anand, their object was not achieved. As before, in most cases, the acquittal became the rule. The experiment was continued for a year and then the court was transferred back to Borsad.

In his legal practice, the qualities which most assisted Vallabhbhai were not so much subtlety and knowledge of the minutiae of law as his commonsense, his understanding of human nature, his extraordinary skill in

cross-examination and his ability for analysing evidence. He rarely accepted a civil case. His reasons for it were refreshingly frank: he wished to earn the maximum amount of money in the shortest possible time; civil cases tended to drag on, and involved far too much legal quibbling. In a very short time, indeed, he became very well known throughout the district as an excellent criminal lawyer; and he achieved this in spite of the fact that, unlike the vast majority of criminal lawyers, he kept away from police officers and magistrates. His success was founded upon sheer merit. He made a detailed study of every case with a view to discovering the week points of the prosecution and used them by skilful cross-examination to break down prosecution witnesses. Once he had completed the cross-examination of the prosecution witness, it was hardly ever necessary for him to argue the case for the defence at any length! His concluding addresses in court used to be extremely brief, to the point and well-argued. He was particularly firm in dealing with police officers who were known to harass the public, and with magistrates whose behaviour towards lawyers was insulting or intimidating. In every case in which Vallabhbhai appeared, both the court and the prosecuting lawyer took care not to stray from the straight and narrow path of correct procedure.

Within three years of setting up practice in Borsad, he found he had earned enough money to go to England for his barristership. He immediately started making the necessary preliminary arrangements. He had always intended to visit England and now he felt that he had in addition a good reason for such a visit, for in all important cases wealthy clients preferred to engage a barrister from Ahmedabad in addition to a local lawyer, however eminent and competent the latter might be. Two or three barristers had been particularly successful in Kheda District, chiefly because they could speak and behave in a domineering manner. They were paid larger fees than Vallabhbhai, who felt it humiliating to have to sit in court as assistant to barristers whom he knew generally to be of inferior calibre and to see them collect larger fees than himself. So in 1905,

he finally decided to proceed to England and wrote to Thomas Cook & Sons for a passage. As it were to prove the old adage, man proposes, but God disposes, when everything was settled, the last reply which Thomas Cook & Sons addressed to V. J. Patel, went by mistake to Vithalbhai as the initials of both the brothers were the same! Vithalbhai, who had also been planning to go abroad, saw his opportunity and took it. He claimed the privilege of the elder brother and suggested that Vallabhbhai should put off his study tour abroad until after his return. Vallabhbhai not merely accepted this proposition, but also undertook to meet Vithalbhai's expenses in England. Everything was arranged quietly and almost secretly. The two brothers went to Bombay one day on the pretext of work and the next day Vithalbhai sailed for England! It was only on Vallabhbhai's return to Borsad that anyone learnt of Vithalbhai's departure. Both the brothers had been living separately in Borsad, but now the younger brother invited his sister-in-law to come and stay with him. Vithalbhai's wife accepted the invitation, but presumably to ensure her husband's safe sojourn abroad and early return, she started feeding Brahmins, and observing all manner of penances. Vallabhbhai raised no objection. But on account of temperamental differences quarrels started in the house between both the brothers' wives. Vallabhbhai felt it would be wrong to reproach his sister-in-law during his brother's absence. He, therefore, sent his own wife to her parents' house, and for the two years that Vithalbhai remained abroad she remained at her parents' house. All this added heavily to his financial burden but, as his practice was flourishing, the additional expense did not worry him.

About the middle of 1908 after an absence of two and a half years, Vithalbhai returned to India qualified as a Barrister. He then settled down in Bombay and resumed his practice. About this time Vallabhbhai's wife fell ill with intestinal trouble. She was taken to Bombay towards the end of 1908 for treatment. Under doctor's advice she was admitted to Kama Hospital, and it was decided to

operate upon her as soon as her general health improved. After making these arrangements, as he had to appear in an important murder trial, Vallabhbhai went back to Anand, leaving instructions that he should be called back as soon as the date of the operation was fixed. The doctor, however, thought it necessary, soon after Vallabhbhai's departure, to carry out an urgent operation. So without informing him, he operated, and sent Vallabhbhai a telegram to say that the operation was successful. The following day, the 11th of January 1909, however, his wife died. Vallabhbhai was informed by a telegram which he received in court. To Vallabhbhai this was a moment of very great pain and sorrow ; but the trial had reached a critical stage. It was a murder case, the accused was a well-known man, and the cross-examination of a most important witness was under way. If the cross-examination was not continued and completed that day, the case might well go against the accused. He controlled his grief, therefore, and went on with his cross-examination. Not until the court adjourned, did he give out the news of his bereavement !

Vallabhbhai felt very sorry that he had not been able to see his wife at the end. His wife had left him two children, Manibehn, who was born in April 1904, and Dahyabhai, in November 1905. Vallabhbhai was only 33 years of age at the time but he decided not to remarry, and stood firmly by that decision in spite of pressure from friends and relations.

Vithalbhai's wife fell ill shortly after this, and this led to further postponement of Vallabhbhai's projected departure for England. Vallabhbhai brought her for a change to Borsad. But in spite of all care, she died early in 1910. Soon after her death, Vallabhbhai finally made up his mind to proceed to England. At that time, Vallabhbhai intended educating both his children in England, as soon as they were a little older. So he left them both as boarders with one Miss Wilson of Queen Mary's School in Bombay. He thought this would help them to learn to talk English more easily.

These ten years of Vallabhbhai's life as a lawyer were in the main, uneventful, although on several occasions Vallabhbhai's special characteristics of independence, fearlessness, and commonsense came well into play.

On the day that he was leaving Borsad for England, he caused a great deal of amusement in the court of the Collector. A goldsmith had been charged with trespass with a view to committing adultery with a woman. He was sentenced to six months imprisonment and had filed an appeal with the Collector. The Collector was camping at the time at Borsad. When the case came up for hearing, he was under the influence of drink, so the Sarishtedar took up the cross-examination. Vallabhbhai objected to this and said, "I have not come to conduct this case before the Sarishtedar. I was under the impression that I had to conduct it before the Collector." This soon brought the Collector out of his stupor, and Vallabhbhai proceeded to argue his case. The Collector enquired, "Is adultery a crime?" Vallabhbhai humorously replied, "No Sir. In all advanced countries, adultery is not an offence but in this backward country, the *sadhus* and magistrates of the lower court like this religious, narrow-minded Brahmin (referring to the Sarishtedar) look upon such an offence as serious." The case was concluded very quickly and the goldsmith was released. This was his last case and Vallabhbhai left for England on the following day by steamer from Bombay.

CHAPTER IV

IN ENGLAND

It was August 1910 when Vallabhbhai left for England. Like Vithalbhai, Vallabhbhai also had kept his plans to himself. On the day he was to leave Borsad for Bombay *en route* to England, he mentioned it casually to a doctor friend of his and to one or two others. He entrusted his house and his practice in Borsad to his younger brother, who had just become a lawyer. When he went on board the steamer, he wore European dress for the first time. He had till that moment never seen anyone use a knife and fork. Vithalbhai introduced him to a minor ruling Thakur of Kathiawad who was travelling with him. Up to Aden the sea was very rough and Vallabhbhai was extremely seasick. Then he began to feel better. Between Aden and Marseilles he completed reading Justinian's Roman Law. On arriving in London he stayed with his Thakur acquaintance at the Hotel Cecil, but finding it too expensive left the very next day to stay with a friend. Later he moved into a boarding house.

He joined the Middle Temple and appeared soon after for an examination in Roman Law and passed out first.

He had gone to England at a relatively mature age and with some experience of the world. There was no question, therefore, of his being distracted from his main objective of qualifying in Law. Indeed, it seemed as though he had for the moment even suppressed his natural bent for fun and humour. His mind was fixed on passing his examinations at the earliest possible date and to return home a fully qualified Barrister-at-Law. The Middle Temple Library was some 11 to 12 miles from where he lived. He himself had very few books and he did not intend to buy any. So everyday he used to go to the Library and study. Every morning he would arrive there at 9 o'clock and remain until 6 o'clock in the evening when the Library closed. He had his lunch and his tea in the Library. He seems to have put

in everyday at least 10 to 12 hours of solid reading. He had all the exercise he needed through his walks between his house and the Library.

In all, twelve terms had to be kept, and during each term every candidate was required to attend a minimum number of dinners at his Inn. As there were four terms in a year, ordinarily a man took three years to become eligible for the Bar but after the 6th term, that is after a year and a half, one could take one's final examination if one so wished. Whoever passed with honours became entitled to an exemption of two terms. Vallabhbhai planned to take his final examination at the end of his sixth term. In the preliminary examination, a prize of £5/- was awarded to the student who passed first in the paper on Equity. Vallabhbhai shared this prize with a Mr G. Davis, who later entered the I.C.S., had a distinguished career in India and retired as the Chief Justice of Sind. Vallabhbhai took his final examination in June 1912. In this he passed first in the first class and was awarded a prize of £ 50/-. Vallabhbhai's outstanding success won him the respect of Indians and Europeans interested in or connected with India. A Mr Shepherd, a retired I.C.S. Officer, who had worked in Gujarat as Commissioner, Northern Division, and was keenly interested in the advancement of the Patidar community was delighted when he read in the papers that a Patidar passed out so brilliantly, and congratulated Vallabhbhai and showed him what hospitality and friendship he could.

To Vallabhbhai the concrete value of his success was the exemption which it brought him of two terms. He had still, however, to put in two more terms, during which all he was expected to do was to eat the prescribed number of dinners. So he applied to the Constitution Committee of the Inn, stating that he had been ill for a length of time, and to stay much longer in England might prove detrimental to his health, and would involve him in considerable expenditure, and that since he had passed the examination with honours it would help him if additional exemption could be given to him. The Constitution Committee considered this

application very carefully. The Benchers had no objection to giving him the exemption, but possibly fearing that if a precedent were created making it possible for a candidate to be called to the Bar in so short a time, very many more Indian students might be attracted to England, the application was turned down, and Vallabhbhai was compelled to live in England for a further period of six months. During this period, he travelled fairly extensively in England.

At that time, the atmosphere in England was particularly tense for Indian students, for in a relatively short space of time there occurred several unusual incidents: Dhingra had murdered Curzon Wylie, Savarkar was sentenced to life imprisonment, while Bipin Chandra Pal delivered a series of fiery speeches. As a consequence Indian students were kept under a close watch. Vallabhbhai was not particularly impressed with the mode of life of the average Indian student in England. He felt that a large number of them were given to luxurious living which they could ill-afford. One student borrowed £ 75 from Vallabhbhai. When Vallabhbhai fell ill, and had to be operated upon, he needed this money. When asked for the return of this loan, this young man became resentful and stopped seeing Vallabhbhai ! It was only after they had both returned to India that the debt was finally cleared and at that time, the friend wrote apologizing for his behaviour and thanking Vallabhbhai for his friendliness and considerateness.

The ceremony of registration of new barristers is not unlike the University convocation ceremonies in our country. In accordance with the usual custom, a Bencher of one of the Inns proposes the name of the new barrister and another member of the Inn supports it. Vallabhbhai went through the list of Benchers and selecting a senior Bencher, went to him although he did not know him and was neither introduced nor recommended to him, and requested him to propose his name. That gentleman was most friendly and not only agreed to propose Vallabhbhai's name but also to find a supporter. It was only

later that Vallabhbhai learnt that his sponsor was a cousin of the then Chief Justice of Bombay, Sir Basil Scott. The ceremony was held with great dignity and pomp, and the members marched in procession. As Vallabhbhai had won first rank in his examinations he was given a position of honour in the procession, immediately after the leader, and attracted attention. After the ceremony was over, his sponsor invited him to dine with him the following day but Vallabhbhai had regretfully to decline, as he had already arranged to sail on that day for India. So his proposer gave him instead a note to his cousin, the Chief Justice of Bombay.

CHAPTER V

BARRISTER

Vallabhbhai landed at Bombay on Thursday, the 13th of February 1913. He went that very day to see Shri Basil Scott, the Chief Justice, as he was anxious to leave for Ahmedabad on the following day. The latter received him with great courtesy and assured him of whatever assistance he could give, if he decided to practise in Bombay. Sir Basil's cousin had suggested that Vallabhbhai should be considered for a high appointment in the Judicial Department. Vallabhbhai, however, was not desirous of entering Government service. He explained to Sir Basil Scott why it was not practicable for him to set up practice in Bombay. It would take him some years to earn adequately, he had already incurred heavy expenditure and his financial condition was not such that he could afford to wait. Sir Basil then said that he would be able to give him an appointment in the Government Law School (at that time LL. B. students attended classes for one hour every evening and so the institution was known as school and not as college). Vallabhbhai thanked him very much for his goodwill and expressed regret at his inability to accept his offer. He was confident of doing well in Ahmedabad; indeed, several clients were even then waiting for him to return and take up their cases.

Vallabhbhai had no desire to achieve pre-eminence among legal practitioners in Bombay. Besides, it is possible that he wanted to serve his own people, for which purpose Ahmedabad was a more convenient centre. Destiny too must have played its part, for two years later Gandhiji returned to India and settled down in Ahmedabad.

While he was still in England, his brother Vithalbhai had entered public life and had been elected member of the Bombay Legislative Council as a representative of the Local self-governing bodies of the Northern Division. It was not possible to combine practice as a lawyer with public work, and so the two brothers decided that while Vithalbhai should devote the whole of his time to public work, Vallabhbhai should keep away from it and earn enough to meet both his and Vithalbhai's expenses. In a speech which he made in 1921, Vallabhbhai said, " If we want independence and if we wish to serve the country, we must be prepared to be poor. We, therefore, decided that one of us should serve the country and the other, the family. My brother gave up his flourishing practice and started on a career of public service, while I bore the burden of maintaining the household. I had, thus, to commit all the sins and he performed all the good deeds, but I reconciled myself by the thought that I could claim at least a share in his good works ! "

Dadasaheb Mavlankar has drawn an interesting picture of Vallabhbhai during this period in an article he wrote on Vallabhbhai's 70th birthday :

" A smart young man, dressed in well-cut clothes, with a felt hat worn slightly at an angle, stern and reserved, his eyes piercing and bright, not given to many words, receiving visitors with just a simple greeting but not entering into any conversation, and of a firm and pensive expression almost as if he looked down upon the world with a sort of superiority complex, talking with an air of confidence and superiority whenever he opened his lips. Such was the new barrister, who had come to Ahmedabad for practice. There were in Ahmedabad at that time about six barristers, only a couple of whom had much practice. The new barrister was naturally a centre of attention for the junior bar. His personality, demeanour, etc. attracted them but they had

mixed feelings of respect, awe and perhaps of subdued resentment at the way he seemed to look at others.

"As a lawyer he had mostly criminal practice. His cross-examination of witnesses was brief but pointed, and he had such a quick judgment of men that by a mere piercing glance at the witness he knew what type of person he was, and led his attack in cross-examination accordingly. In conducting cases he always exhibited a thorough mastery of facts, a proper and correct estimate of the opponent's points and line of attack, and a carefully planned defence and attack. But the one great quality which struck everybody and won for him the admiration of all was the fearlessness with which he dealt with the court in which he was appearing. He would never allow a judge to overstep even in the least the limits of courtesy, nor would he allow or tolerate any unfairness, injustice or improper leaning on the part of the court in favour of the police or the prosecution. He had always to appear for the defence and his presence as a defence counsel not only inspired confidence in the client but kept the judge and the prosecution within their legitimate bounds. He would spare neither the judge nor the prosecutor, nor the police, and called a spade a spade. It is difficult now for people to realize what this meant in 1913-14 when the people and the bar held notions very different from now about respect and courtesy for authority. Their notions of courtesy and respect savoured of flattery and servility. Vallabhbhai was far above such behaviour and never minced matters for fear of losing practice before a judge, if he thought it necessary to criticize or expose that judge's conduct. He thus safeguarded the self-respect of the bar and of the public."

Mavlankar gives a fine illustration of this:

"The Kheda district was then considered by Government officials to be a criminal district. Criminal cases from Kheda district used to be tried by the Sessions Court at Ahmedabad. The jury consisted of persons from Ahmedabad, Kheda district itself not being given the right of trial by jury. In a murder case, two brothers, against whom there was practically no *prima facie* evidence, were not only committed for trial but bail was refused to them by the Sessions Judge. During the Sessions trial Vallabhbhai had a straight thrust at the judge. At the beginning of the trial, he applied for bail and inquired why the accused were not granted bail. The police put forward the usual plea that the accused would tamper with the prosecution evidence and as this was a Kheda case the accused should be taken to be dangerous persons. Vallabhbhai exclaimed: 'I regret very much to note that no accused from Kheda gets a fair trial in this court. If there is insufficient evidence it is suggested that the accused being

a Kheda man must have tampered with it. Since the district is considered to be criminal, whether there is evidence or no, it is thought that the accused must be convicted. That appears to be the reasoning of this court. If this were not the case, I do not see why bail should not have been granted in a case like this where there is not even *prima facie* evidence of the guilt of the accused.' Vallabhbhai said this in the open court in the presence of a large number of lawyers. The judge was stunned at this frontal attack, the more so as there was truth in the defence counsel's charge. He said: 'Mr Patel, you are obviously in an excited mood when you make such a serious allegation against the court. We will adjourn and meet after half an hour.' The judge went to his chamber and immediately passed orders granting bail which he had refused a little earlier. Needless to add that the trial resulted in the acquittal of the accused."

One more instance may be given of Vallabhbhai's methods as a lawyer. They were his own, vigorous, blunt and to the point. A Baraiya was murdered in his own house. Two Baraiyas belonging to different villages were sent up for trial for this murder by the Police. When the Police Patel went in to give evidence, Vallabhbhai asked him: "Did you alter the names of the murderers which were recorded in the first report?" The Police Patel replied: "The deceased's father mentioned two names, thereafter his wife in her statement gave two other names. I had, therefore, to make necessary corrections." Vallabhbhai inquired if he took money for changing the names. The Police Patel's rejoinder was that he took nothing. Vallabhbhai immediately exclaimed; "Oh! You seem to be a regular *dharamraj* (Prince of Virtues). But I know you Police Patels. You people cause murders to be committed, houses to be burnt, thefts to be perpetrated, and even receive stolen property. You are giving evidence on oath. Please speak the truth, otherwise I shall have to cross-question you and expose all your misdeeds." The poor man was completely unnerved, and although he had come fully prepared, his evidence was completely shaken, and both the accused were acquitted.

Vallabhbhai did not accept too many cases. His fees were high, higher than those charged normally by other barristers practising at the time in Ahmedabad. He wished

The Two Brothers as Barristers-at-Law

to earn only what was sufficient to cover Vithalbhai's expenditure in Bombay, his own in Ahmedabad and whatever else was needed for his family (in the larger sense).

After the court rose for the day, he used to go to the Gujarat Club, for a game of bridge. His skill as a bridge player came to be rapidly known in the Club and he and his partner were challenged to a bridge match by Shris Wadia and Broker. The former was a senior barrister and had introduced the game in the Gujarat Club and believed himself to be a first-class bridge player. Vallabhbhai accepted the challenge but said that he would not play for the usual stakes of one or two annas a point but at the rate of five pounds a hundred points. This was accepted by the challengers who felt confident of winning. But on the first day they lost 15 to 20 pounds ; on the second day they again lost 25 to 30 pounds, and members of the Club began seriously to consider whether the Club ought to permit such high stakes ! On the third day, Shrimati Wadia, who had by then come to hear of this match, stopped her husband from going to the Club, and later requested Vallabhbhai to be good enough to discourage her husband from continuing the match. Vallabhbhai readily agreed, for he himself did not like playing for such high stakes but had only wanted to teach a lesson to these two who were too proud of their skill at the game.

Vallabhbhai may be said to have continued to practise until the end of 1919 but, in fact, after March 1918, when he went with Gandhiji to Nadiad to take part in the Kheda Satyagraha, he was not able to devote much time to his practice. He remained in Nadiad for about four months in connection with the Kheda movement, and his public activities in Ahmedabad had also increased. From the beginning of 1919, warnings had been sounded that a passive resistance movement might be started against the Rowlatt Act. Widespread disturbances took place and a good deal of his time was spent in assisting people who became involved in them and in keeping the public agitation on the right track. Then for about four months, he appeared in cases before the special court which was appointed to try

those charged with the removal of the railway track between Nadiad and Barejadi. These were the last occasions in which he practised his profession.

CHAPTER VI

MUNICIPAL ADMINISTRATION

In spite of his resolve to leave public work to Vithalbhai and to devote his energies to money-making, Vallabhbhai was gradually drawn into social, municipal and welfare activities. As a member of the Gujarat Club, he came in contact with a large number of public workers of Ahmedabad, such as Govindrao Patil, Shivabhai Patel, Chimanlal Thakor, Maganbhai Chaturbhai Patel and others. In those days, public activity, whether political or social, was virtually the monopoly of pleaders and barristers. Sir Ramanbhai and Dewan Bahadur Harilalbhai Desai were the recognized leaders of all such work in Ahmedabad.

In 1914 the Government of Bombay amended their District Municipal Act and compelled the municipalities of the larger cities to have I. C. S. officers as their Municipal Commissioners. As a colleague of the Collector and the Commissioner it was only to be expected that the Municipal Commissioner would wield considerable influence, and with the Municipal administration in his hands, the Municipal Councillors far from controlling him would themselves be very much under his control. In 1916 the Bombay Presidency Political Conference was held in Ahmedabad. There a resolution was moved placing on record this generally held apprehension. They commended the abolition of this amendment on the ground that the burden of such highly paid officers on small municipalities would be staggering, and it was not fair to saddle them with such highly paid officers. The resolution, however, was not accepted by the Government.

The first officer to be appointed as the Municipal Commissioner of Ahmedabad was Mr. Shillidy, a Britisher.

His rather arrogant and self-opinionated manner repelled most people. It was generally recognized that only someone with Vallabhbhai's skill, shrewdness and fearlessness, could organize the agitation for the abolition of the post of Municipal Commissioner, and, in the meantime, control him. Many of his friends accordingly requested Vallabhbhai to enter the Municipality. He was told that he would have no difficulty in combining his professional work with his municipal duties. His great friend Chimanlal Thakor, however, advised him against taking part in public life, mainly on the ground that there was no public spirit among the people and that they were too full of fear. Vallabhbhai was not impressed by this line of argument. He was firmly of the view that it was for the leaders to mould the people and instil public spirit in them. It was this line of thought that seems eventually to have convinced him of the desirability of joining the Municipality. He was prevailed upon early in 1917 to stand as a candidate in the by-election. He was successful, but his election was challenged, and was set aside. A couple of months later, however, there was a re-election and Vallabhbhai was returned unopposed.

At that time the Municipal Board was composed of 40 members. It was fortunate in its President, Sir Ramanbhai, and its Chairman of the Managing Committee, Rao Saheb Harilalbhai, both men of great ability, integrity and public spirit. They were unfortunately not backed by a cohesive group of members. Both in his temperament and in his way of thinking, Vallabhbhai differed very greatly from these two distinguished public servants. They were all three, however, equally keen in their desire to serve their city, and so they started working unitedly for the Municipality. Later, during the days of civil disobedience, their paths diverged; but their joint work in the Municipality had shown to each the genuine worth of the others and they continued throughout their lives to entertain the greatest regard and respect for one another.

Vallabhbhai soon realized that if the Municipality was to discharge its functions adequately, not only must there

be devoted, selfless and able councillors, but also conscientious, loyal and trained municipal officers. At that time, however, the principal servants of the Municipality were in the main indifferent towards the welfare of the city and behaved often in an irresponsible manner. The Collector and the Commissioner, interfered unduly in municipal affairs. Vallabhbhai decided to devote his energies initially to establishing right and proper relationship between municipal officers and staff on the one hand, and popular representatives of the Municipality on the other. His first task, thus, was to make the Municipal Commissioner realize what was expected of him, and what his legitimate functions were. As it appeared later in ample measure, Vallabhbhai did not formulate his plans until he had made a careful study of the administration and discovered for himself both its strong and its weak points. And it so happened that there were not a few defects in the administration of the Ahmedabad Municipality.

The Government had handed over to the Municipality a small lake in 1914. It bred mosquitoes in such abundance that the Municipality decided to fill it up. One of the Municipal Councillors, Shri Fateh Mohammad Munshi, owned a match factory near by and was using the lake for seasoning the timber required for the match sticks. He claimed ownership of the lake and when he lost his case in the lower courts, filed a suit against the Government. He went up in appeal to the High Court, but there, too, the judgment went against him. On the strength of his contributions to the war loans, as a last resort he sought the assistance of the Municipal Commissioner, Mr Shillidy, to ensure that somehow or other the lake remained unfilled and available to him for use. The Municipal Commissioner agreed to help in recognition of his assistance during the war, and in spite of the Government's very clear orders, arranged matters so that the lake remained with Fateh Mohammad for use. Not content with this, when the Commissioner, Northern Division, confirmed that the lake belonged to the Municipality, Mr Shillidy recommended that the lake should be given to Fateh Mohammad on

permanent lease. This was a typical instance of this officer's conduct towards the Municipal Board.

Vallabhbhai obtained from the Government pleader full details of the case and went carefully through the papers on the subject in the municipal records. Armed with facts, thus ascertained, Vallabhbhai moved in the General Board a long resolution on the 7th June 1917, charging the Municipal Commissioner with deliberate insubordination and demanded his removal. Vallabhbhai deplored the attitude of the Municipal Commissioner in the matter of the lake which had placed the Municipal Board in an embarrassing position. It had left the Municipality the choice between putting up with his insolent and insubordinate attitude and dispensing with his services. Mr Shillidy had informed the Government without asking the Board that the Municipality did not require this lake and that it had no use for it. The Board could only express its surprise and its regret that a Municipal Officer of Mr Shillidy's standing should not have appreciated the importance of a piece of land, roughly 53,000 sq. yards in area, situated near the railway station and in a direction in which the city was likely to develop. So far was he indeed from safeguarding the interests of the Municipality that he tried even to question the Municipality's right to ownership of this land, which even the courts had accepted. Vallabhbhai asked the Board to note this disregard of the Municipality's interests. Finally, Vallabhbhai brought to light an astonishing fact. Mr Shillidy had, it seems, cut out 13 significant words from the last paragraph of a letter addressed to the Government after it had been approved by the Board. This was clearly most reprehensible. The draft resolution concluded that if municipal work was to be carried out satisfactorily Mr Shillidy must be removed from his post as Municipal Commissioner.

This was perhaps the first instance in the history of the Ahmedabad Municipality when a resolution couched in such firm language had been moved against a British I.C.S. officer. The facts were such that even the staunchest of supporters of the Government in the Board found it difficult

to challenge, and Vallabhbhai's resolution was passed by a majority.

Mr Shillidy's successor was a Mr Master. His principal anxiety appeared to be to make his post as lucrative for himself as possible and he asked for various allowances in addition to his pay. Vallabhbhai was then the Chairman of the Sanitary Committee and he merely filed these papers. Some time later Mr Master enquired of the Chairman of the Managing Committee what orders had been passed on his request, adding that he would welcome an early decision, and that he was not desirous of staying on if the allowances he had asked for were not conceded. The Chairman, knowing the papers were before the Sanitary Committee, turned to Vallabhbhai who immediately replied that the Government had appointed Mr Master after fixing his salary and allowances, and if he was not satisfied with those terms, he was at liberty to go. Mr Master had received his reply and shortly afterwards left Municipal service.

The Commissioner of Northern Division during this period was a Mr Pratt, about whom we shall learn more later in connection with the Kheda movement. He was regarded as an able officer. But he was very conscious of the power which the bureaucracy then exercised, and anxious to retain control over all the municipalities and local Boards in his Division. In Ahmedabad, he decided he would have, besides the Municipal Commissioner two more British officers, one as Municipal Engineer and the other as Health Officer. Accordingly, as soon as the post of Municipal Engineer fell vacant, he proposed the name of a British Officer, in spite of the fact that two fully qualified Indian candidates were available. He brought what pressure he could and even wrote recommendatory letters to the Councillors nominated on the Board by the Government. This candidate was a railway engineer and had no special qualification for the post of Municipal Engineer. On the other hand, the two Indian candidates were far superior to him in experience and knowledge. Even so, because of this powerful backing, the Englishman was selected by a majority of one vote. If he had been competent at his work, the

matter might have ended there. But he turned out to be incompetent and unsatisfactory. To test him, as it were, water shortage in certain parts of the city had at this time, become so chronic that it called for immediate attention. In the slightly elevated areas of the city water was practically not available during day time, and even at night very little water reached those areas. This led to serious dissatisfaction and a meeting of protest was held under the auspices of the Gujarat Sabha with Gandhiji as President. A copy of the resolution passed at that meeting was sent to the President of the Municipality as well as to the Collector and the Commissioner. On receiving it, the Commissioner invited the Secretaries of the Gujarat Sabha to meet him. It would seem his intention was to make it clear to them that he was greatly angered by all this agitation. When the Secretaries of the Sabha, Shivabhai Patel and Dadasaheb Mavlankar saw him, his first question was: "Why has this resolution been sent to me? What have I to do with the Municipality?" and drew their attention to the District Municipal Act. Shivabhai suggested that he could use his good offices with the Municipality. The Commissioner took this remark to be an oblique reference to the part he had played in the appointment of the Municipal Engineer and repeated that he was not responsible for the actions of the Municipality. Shivabhai then suggested that he could at least influence the nominated members of the Board. This also was not calculated to soothe the feelings of the Commissioner and he replied angrily: "The Act speaks only of the Municipality. It makes no distinction between the elected and the nominated members. If you have any grievance, go to the Municipal Hall. Do not let the Municipal Committee have peace till you get what you want. If you still do not get water, go to their houses and burn them." This concluded the meeting. The Secretaries gave an account of the meeting to all concerned on the following day, and Shri Mavlankar was deputed to represent the matter on behalf of the Sabha to the President of the Municipality. He met the President, the Chairman of the Managing Committee and Vallabhbhai, the Chairman

of the Sanitary Committee. After Mavlankar had placed before them the resolution passed by the public meeting, Vallabhbhai inquired if he had been to see the Commissioner of the Northern Division in this connection on the previous day, and whether it was a fact that the Commissioner had advised him to burn the houses of the Councillors. In reply, Mavlankar gave an account of the interview and explained in what context the Commissioner had given that advice, adding that obviously the advice was not intended to be taken literally.

As the Commissioner used to keep himself informed of whatever went on in the Municipality, it is possible that he heard of this conversation. Anyhow, it had now become imperative for him not merely to see that the Engineer was continued as Engineer but also to prove that he was fit for it. He, therefore, wrote to the Bombay Government and arranged for their Consulting Engineer to come to Ahmedabad and study the water supply situation. Within eight days, the Consulting Engineer arrived in Ahmedabad. It was arranged that he should see the affected parts of the city, accompanied by the Municipal Engineer. Vallabhbhai was also invited to accompany them as the Chairman of the Sanitary Committee. Although Mr Pratt was obviously not directly concerned, he also joined the party. Some discussion took place regarding arrangements to be made. When, however, Vallabhbhai was starting to offer a suggestion and had barely begun with the words : "The best way to meet the situation to my mind is", the Commissioner interjected with the remark : "The best way, Mr Patel, is for your Committee to co-operate with the Municipal Engineer and not to non-co-operate." Vallabhbhai was not prepared to put up with such rudeness even from so senior an officer and he promptly retorted : "The best way is to dispense with the services of this incompetent officer whom you have foisted on this Municipality. What is it that the Municipal Engineer wanted and my Committee has not agreed to ? Ask him if there is any such thing. Yet when the Secretaries of the Gujarat Sabha waited on you in deputation, you had the impertinence to advise them to burn our houses. Why burn

our houses? Why not burn the bungalow of that fellow who is at the root of the trouble?" The Commissioner realized that he had gone too far, but remarked, "Mr Patel, you do not appear to be in a mood to discuss." Vallabhbhai asked: "How do you expect me to be?" This put an end to further discussion. The whole programme of inspection was suspended. Within a few days of this incident, the Municipal Engineer resigned and left. It is possible that the Commissioner advised him to do so before matters took a more serious turn.

Vallabhbhai then took up another important problem. A number of municipal taxes were not being collected in full from a large number of tax-payers. Among these were some Government officers, leading citizens and public institutions. Vallabhbhai had the whole matter carefully investigated and by means of a few pertinent questions to the President at a meeting of the General Board made public the names of all who were in arrears, the sums outstanding against each of them, and the period over which they had paid no taxes. One of these gentlemen was a Government pensioner, a Khan Bahadur, and an honorary first class magistrate. During the period that he had not paid his taxes, he had worked as a Municipal Magistrate. By a judicious mixture of threats and persuasion, Vallabhbhai succeeded in recovering the arrears from this gentleman as also from most others.

At this time one Shri Wadia was the Water Works Engineer. Although there was not enough water in the wells of the Water Works, it would have been possible greatly to reduce the hardships of the public, had more care been taken in the distribution of water, and in adjusting it to the refilling capacity of the wells. But the Water Works Engineer appeared to be utterly indifferent and allowed things to take their course. He had been so long in municipal service that he seemed to have thought he could afford to ignore advice and directions whether they came from the Municipal Engineer, or other experts, or even from the President. Vallabhbhai was about to take disciplinary action against this officer when two or three

incidents happened in quick succession which proved the latter's incompetence and unsuitability beyond a shadow of doubt. Within a period of four months two large fires broke out in the city. The special pipes which should have been opened for the supply of water in such an emergency had not been opened, with the result that water for fire fighting was not available till too late and the consequent loss by fire was far more serious than it need have been. Vallabhbhai had gone to the places where these fires had occurred and had seen with his own eyes how the water supply had failed. Thereafter he saw that Wadia's incompetence was made public and taken note of at a meeting of the Board.

Although there were four engines in the Water Works, only one engine was used continuously all the twentyfour hours of the day. The other three were said to be in need of extensive repairs. The absurdity of this arrangement was self-evident, and no argument was necessary to convince the General Board of its folly. If it ever became necessary to stop the fourth for repair or if there was an accident, the city would have had to go without water. Apart from the risk, another serious consequence of making one engine work continuously for twentyfour hours was that the tanks tended to overflow at night when there was very little demand for water, with the result that every day some 5 to 6 lakh gallons of water were being wasted ; and this waste was taking place at a time when the supply wells were themselves short of water! Both the Municipal Commissioner and the Municipal Engineer had given written warnings to Shri Wadia to stop this waste of water and had also warned him of the serious consequences to the city if the engine failed, but Shri Wadia paid no heed. According to the Municipal Engineer, it should have been possible to prevent this overflow either by reducing the speed of the engine or by stopping the engine for a short period at night. But Shri Wadia's explanation was that the condition of the engine was such that it was quite impossible to regulate its speed according to the rate of consumption of water.

On another occasion when a fire broke out in Sakar Bazar just outside Panchkua Gate, Shri Wadia caused great wastage of water by opening up wrong valves. He was admonished by the Municipal Commissioner and held responsible for the resultant loss.

Against this background of incompetence or indifference, Vallabhbhai proposed at a meeting of the General Board on the 19th May 1919 that Shri Wadia should be suspended immediately and asked to show cause within a fortnight why he should not be dismissed forthwith. Vallabhbhai suggested further that the Municipal Commissioner should be asked to make immediate arrangements for the appointment of a suitable engineer to take charge of the Water Works. Strange, though it may sound, although the case against Shri Wadia was so convincing and clear, and his indifference and obstinacy had caused and was continuing to cause heavy loss to the Municipality and to the city, some Councillors seriously attempted to prevent definite action from being taken. These attempts failed, however, and Vallabhbhai's proposal was accepted. What should be noted is that though there was no doubt whatever about the incompetence of this officer, Vallabhbhai did not take any action against him until the case against him was complete and fully supported by documents and by experts.

Another interesting incident in this period of Vallabhbhai's municipal career concerns the question of supply of water to the cantonment area, where, besides the troops, there lived for the most part senior Government officers, a great majority of whom in those days were British. Water was being supplied to the cantonment from the Municipal Water Works at a lower rate than that charged in the city. Vallabhbhai, as Chairman of the Sanitary Committee, proposed to the General Board that the Cantonment authorities should be informed that they would be required to pay a share of the initial expenditure as well as the current expenditure. The cantonment authorities argued that the Municipality was bound to supply them water at the rate agreed upon. This controversy dragged

on for several years and it was only in 1924 — as is described in a later chapter — that the matter was finally settled.

CHAPTER VII

BEGINNING OF CONSTRUCTIVE WORK IN THE MUNICIPALITY

In February 1919, the triennial election of the Municipal Board took place and it brought into the Municipality a certain amount of fresh blood, strengthening, on the whole, Vallabhbhai's following. In the old Board he had no particular party-following but he was nevertheless able to secure for many of his schemes a majority by virtue of the fact that his proposals were recognized to be conceived in the interests of the public and of the city. Without such support he would not have found it possible to clear up the augean stables to the extent he did. When the new Board was elected, the political atmosphere in the country was tense on account of the Rowlatt Bill * but the party which Vallabhbhai had built up in the Municipality had no political objective. Its only aim was to develop among the citizens the necessary ability for running public organizations and doing work of public interest fearlessly, assiduously and zealously. Ever since the beginning of 1915 when Gandhiji came to India and made Ahmedabad his place of residence, his influence was felt on the public life of the country. Vallabhbhai, however, came in direct contact with him for the first time in November 1917 when the first Gujarat Political Conference was held at Godhra under Gandhiji's presidentship. In that conference Gandhiji said, "if we are unable to run our village administration skilfully, honestly and justly, how can we justify our demand for the independence of our country ?" That was precisely also the standpoint of those who had become Vallabhbhai's colleagues on the new Municipal Board.

* The Bill provided special powers to the Government for arresting and detaining, without trial, persons suspected of anti-government activities.

Under the influence of the Non-co-operation Movement which Gandhiji launched in the latter half of 1920, Vallabhbhai and his colleagues rejected the Government grant for municipal schools and thereby also governmental control over municipal education. It would not be altogether unfair, therefore, to say that to that extent they had introduced politics into municipal administration. At the same time it was undoubtedly also true that in seeking to remove governmental control over education, they were influenced also by their conviction that it was imperative to attune children's education to the conditions prevalent in our country, while governmental education was altogether unrelated to Indian life. Vallabhbhai took the greatest care to see that the municipal battle was waged strictly within the law and it was because of this that he was able to secure to a very considerable extent the support even of Councillors who certainly could not be described as non-co-operators and who did not ordinarily take part in politics.

If the municipal administration in the city were to be improved, it was necessary not merely to improve its administrative machinery but also to take in hand certain constructive tasks. Among the first of these were improvement of water supply, and the installation of a proper drainage system. Unless these two tasks were satisfactorily tackled, people's hardships could not be reduced, and they would have a just grievance. From a long term point of view, unless there was adequate water supply, it would be impossible for the city to expand and develop. The Water Works were first started in Ahmedabad in 1891, and were designed to meet the needs of the population of the city at that date. Being an important centre of industry and art, the city grew so rapidly that very soon the water-supply was insufficient for the minimum needs of the population. For a time they managed to carry on by recourse to expedients which increased the water supply a little, but both Government engineers and other experts were aware that such unplanned approach to so basic a problem would not do for long, and that it was necessary to devise a definite scheme for increasing the supply of water by damming the

river at some point and for making it pass through a good filter before distribution. Accordingly, a comprehensive scheme was prepared in 1911 of which the cost was estimated at Rs 9,00,000 but before it could be implemented, it had to be amended in consultation with experts, one effect of which was to increase the estimated cost. Then the First World War of 1914-18 occurred, so the scheme could not be put into force until 1920. In the intervening period, the people had to put up with chronic shortage of water. Whenever any temporary remedy was suggested, the municipal authorities urged as an excuse for doing nothing the argument that it would be best to wait until the comprehensive scheme could be implemented. Each year the people were kept in hopes that something effective would be done by the next hot weather.

In 1919, Vallabhbhai as Chairman of the Sanitary Committee felt that this vital problem could not be shelved any longer. As Chairman of the Sanitary Committee of the previous Board, he had made a careful study of the whole situation and he now drew up, in consultation with his experts, a less expensive scheme which could be put into force almost immediately. He put his revised proposal in the form of a detailed report before the Municipal Board. In this report, he recounted the history of the Ahmedabad Water Works, and both posed the problem and provided a solution in his characteristically practical manner.

Incidentally, it is interesting to note that while the city was experiencing such serious shortage of water, the cantonment received water throughout the 24 hours. Vallabhbhai gave his estimate of the current requirements of water and the steps to be taken to meet those requirements. At least 30 gallons of water per head instead of 10 were necessary for daily use and supply had to be arranged at that rate for at least 3,00,000 people. The total daily requirement was thus 9 million gallons. The existing wells were incapable of providing more than ½ million gallons and even the comprehensive scheme was not designed to produce more than 5 to 7 million gallons. It was, therefore,

necessary to take immediate steps to draw additional water directly from the river.

Along with the question of the quantity of water, its purity also had to be considered. It was not correct, as many people seemed to believe, that the city was receiving water which was naturally purified by the river sand. Before the monsoon when the level of the water in the river goes down, well water, according to experts, is not fit for human consumption. The water is naturally purified to an adequate extent only if it is drawn from a well not less than 150 ft. away from the current of the river ; but the further away a well is dug the less the water supply in it. The non-official experts whom Vallabhbhai consulted were of the view that it would be advisable to give up the idea of obtaining naturally purified water through wells, as it was an expensive method. It would be cheaper to purify the water chemically. The capital cost would not exceed Rs 25,000/- and the recurring expenditure on chemicals would be about Rs 13,000/-. The Government Sanitary Engineer also confirmed this view. Other methods of obtaining pure water were likely to cost initially some 10 lakhs of rupees and to involve a recurring expenditure of Rs $1\frac{1}{4}$ lakhs. Moreover, such schemes would take at least three years to complete, whereas the simplified arrangements Vallabhbhai had proposed would require only six weeks. Taking all things into consideration, Vallabhbhai's proposals were accepted. Vallabhbhai recommended further that they should request the Sanitary Board of the Government to send their experts to Ahmedabad to set up a permanent laboratory there for testing water as had been done in Poona and Karachi. Such a laboratory was most necessary for a city of Ahmedabad's size.

After water, the next most important task was to reduce the extreme congestion in the city. The Town Planning Expert of the Government had drawn up a scheme for the expansion of the city. He had recommended the construction of a new relief road. It was decided at a meeting of the General Board on the 8th July 1920 to ask

the Chief Officer to prepare immediately a detailed estimate of the cost of acquiring buildings which it would be necessary to acquire for constructing the proposed new road.

In the meantime, the political atmosphere in the country was daily getting worse. Gandhiji had started his epoch-making movement of non-co-operation and Vallabhbhai had joined it whole-heartedly. He was anxious to see that the Municipality of Ahmedabad and its Councillors supported this great movement for independence to the maximum extent possible. He realized at the same time that the Municipality was an institution established by law and supported by the Government. The extent of municipal participation in the non-co-operation movement had necessarily, therefore, to be limited. Moreover, it was essential that nothing should be done to invite any restrictive action against the Municipality which might affect the health and the convenience of the citizens. In spite of such considerations serving as brakes on the political inclinations of the Municipality, Government officers did not like even the restricted support given by the Municipality to the non-co-operation movement, which according to them was outside the sphere of the Municipality. They could not distinguish between municipal work and political work when the person carrying on the two tasks happened to be one and the same individual.

CHAPTER VIII

THE GUJARAT SABHA

The Gujarat Sabha was established in 1884. Its object was by means of representations and petitions to place the grievances and the difficulties of the public before the Government. The Sabha was instrumental in organizing the Bombay Presidency Political Conference in Ahmedabad in 1916 under the presidentship of Mr Jinnah, who was at that time not only a Congress leader but a staunch advocate of Hindu-Muslim unity. Mr Jinnah's efforts were then directed towards achieving political progress through the co-operative effort of the Congress and the League. And it was mainly because of him that the two organizations held their respective annual sessions at the same time in Bombay in 1915.

This session of the Bombay Presidency Political Conference was particularly significant. After the split in Congress which took place at Surat, the extreme wing under Lokmanya Tilak found itself greatly estranged from the rest of the Congress. But after the death of Pherozshah Mehta and Gokhale in 1915, Tilak returned to the Congress fold and at the 1916 Conference, after many years, all the leaders, moderates and extremists, met together once again on the same platform. Among these were Sir Chimanlal Setalvad, Gokuldas Kahandas Parekh, Tilak and Kelkar.

Vallabhbhai, as a resident of Ahmedabad, attended the Conference with Vithalbhai but did not take active part. He did not offer any remarks even when a resolution was moved protesting against the Government's new practice of appointing civil service officers as municipal commissioners or executive officers of municipalities. Ostensibly, Vallabhbhai's reason for his silence was the division of responsibility, to which he had agreed, between Vithalbhai and himself, whereby public work was assigned to the former. His real reason, however, was that there was no action contemplated in case the Government ignored the

proposals expressed mildly by the moderates, in the form of applications and requests, or in strong and scathing terms by the extremists. To Vallabhbhai all such mere resolutions appeared to be just waste of time. Nevertheless, when soon after the Conference, some friends urged him to enter the Municipality as a Councillor so that there might be someone able and strong enough to stand up to the British I. C. S. Municipal Commissioner, he allowed himself to be persuaded, as we have already said. He regarded the appointment of the I. C. S. officer as a challenge, and agreed, therefore, to enter the "lists" with a view to protecting the rights of the public. Besides, there was something in his nature which made him particularly adept at municipal work. Maintenance of cleanliness and neatness both in one's person and in one's surroundings was to him almost second nature. So he took readily to municipal activities and discharged his responsibilities in a truly admirable manner.

Gandhiji returned to India early in 1915 and after spending a short time in Shantiniketan he went to Ahmedabad in April, where he established his Ashram. On one or two occasions he visited the Gujarat Club to meet the members and to expound his scheme for establishing a national school as one of the activities of the Ashram. On one of these occasions Vallabhbhai was playing a game of bridge in the Club, but did not even trouble to stop the game to go and listen to him.

In April 1917, however, when Gandhiji declined to obey the orders of the Magistrate of Champaran District (in Bihar) to leave the district, and when the newspapers published Gandhiji's dignified and firm statement in the court in the case that followed his defiance, the people in the country sat up and took notice of him. For a few days this was the only topic of conversation in the Gujarat Club and their respect for Gandhiji increased enormously. They decided as a token of their appreciation to request Gandhiji to accept the presidentship of the Gujarat Sabha.

After Gandhiji became the President of the Sabha, it was decided to hold the Political Conference in Gujarat

every year. The first such conference met at Godhra, the headquarters of the Panch Mahal District, the most backward of all areas in Gujarat. Gandhiji presided over the Conference and he made it in many ways unique. Although it was the political conference of Gujarat, leaders of other provinces were also invited and many of them attended it. Vithalbhai Patel came from Bombay. His active participation was to be expected but Jinnah's attendance was significant. As a symbol of Hindu-Muslim unity he received a rousing welcome. Tilak Maharaj and his great friend, Khaparde, added to the importance of the occasion by their presence. An innovation effected by Gandhiji was that all speeches were in Gujarati. Sarojini Naidu, on hearing that Jinnah had spoken at this conference in Gujarati, wrote that this was indeed a miraculous triumph for Gandhiji. Tilak spoke in Marathi.

Another innovation at this Conference was the omission to pass a resolution at the outset affirming loyalty to the British Empire and to the Crown. Gandhiji felt that loyalty must be assumed, and asked of his critics whether the British commenced conferences in their own country with any such 'loyalty' resolution. This was a new approach and while it pleased many who had no great love for the British Empire, it taught a sense of proportion in the matter to those who were loyal.

But the most important of all changes was the decision by the Conference at Gandhiji's instance to appoint an Executive Committee which would remain in existence throughout the year until the next session was held. Hitherto, conferences and congresses were like annual festivals. There was usually great enthusiasm among the people at the time the conference was held, and thereafter nothing or next to nothing was done during the rest of the year. Hereafter, with the adoption of this new system, the President of the Conference was to nominate his Executive Committee and with its help endeavour to implement the decisions taken at the Conference. On this occasion Gandhiji as the President of the Conference became also the President of the Executive Committee and Vallabhbhai

was appointed its Secretary. Ahmedabad was made the headquarters of the Committee.

A resolution was passed at this Conference in regard to forced labour *, and the Executive Committee was asked to pursue the matter with a view to bringing about the abolition of this unjust and evil custom at the earliest possible moment. Before deciding upon the appropriate course of action to achieve their objective the Committee thought it advisable to ascertain the Government's views. Gandhiji accordingly drafted a letter, which Vallabhbhai as Secretary of the Committee sent to Mr Pratt, the Commissioner of the Northern Division. In the view of the Committee there did not seem to be any legal justification for forced labour. The practice, however, appeared to have been prevalent for many years and was taken advantage of particularly by the Revenue Officers. The Committee enquired, therefore, if the practice had the approval of the Government, formal or informal. It was pointed out that in accordance with the resolution of the Conference it was the intention of the Committee to warn the public to discontinue this practice and not to submit to what appeared to them to be illegal exaction. If the Sabha's view was in any way incorrect, the Government was requested to explain why it was incorrect. Certain legal rulings in regard to the

* It was the custom of Government officers when touring in the district to extract work from certain sections of the people, and often not to pay for it. The village carpenter, for instance, would be called upon to make the wooden pegs for the officers' tents, the potter to provide earthen vessels and even to fetch water in them, the barber to tidy up and to do the lamps, the sweeper to sweep and to take and fetch messages, the grocer to supply all foodstuffs, and the peasants to arrange bullock carts for transporting the Saheb's luggage from one camp to another. The petty officers of the village had to remain in attendance throughout the period of the officer's stay and in addition, to look after the needs of the Serishtedar (the judicial clerk) and other clerks. It was rarely that all this work and supplies were paid for, and on top of it all, all these men had to remain in attendance for hours, and sometime for days, on end. After the Home Rule League was established, vigorous agitation was started to put an end to this pernicious system.

illegality of forced labour were attached to the letter. To a staunch bureaucrat like Mr Pratt, such a letter appeared to be the height of insolence. It is understood that he grew very angry on receiving it and threw it into the waste paper basket. Evidently he did not realize that his behaviour was contemptuous of the representatives of the people. During this period Gandhiji spent the greater part of his time in Champaran where he had started constructive work among the peasants, and only came now and again for a few days to Ahmedabad, when he gave whatever instructions and advice were necessary in respect of the various activities that had been initiated by him. When he learnt of Pratt's conduct, he said that it could not be ignored. The first step was to send a reminder to the Commissioner and ask for a reply. This reminder, too, met with the same fate as the original letter. Then under Gandhiji's advice, Vallabhbhai wrote a third letter in which, after referring to the two previous letters, he added that if no reply was received, the public would be advised at the end of ten days on behalf of the Committee that forced labour was illegal and that people should, under no circumstances, submit to it. The Commissioner was very angry on receiving this letter and invited the Secretary of the Committee to see him at a given time and date at his office. Vallabhbhai replied that to him there appeared to be no point for discussion, but if there were any legal rulings by which the practice could be regarded as legal, he would be glad to be informed of them. If, however, the Commissioner himself wanted to meet him, he would be glad to see him in the office of the Committee. For an officer of Mr Pratt's rank and status to receive such a letter was something novel. He had, however, by ignoring the first two letters, placed himself at a disadvantage. When the ten days' period was over, Vallabhbhai published a pamphlet on the subject and distributed it throughout the villages of Gujarat. The workers of the Political Conference also set out to educate the public, and gradually the movement against forced labour gathered momentum. A certain number of cases of forced labour, however, did occur and although the custom cannot be said wholly to have

disappeared, it ceased thereafter to be the great nuisance and hardship it had been.

Towards the end of 1917, plague broke out in Ahmedabad and assumed serious proportions. Schools and courts were closed and many people went away from the city. Vallabhbhai was at that time the Chairman of the Sanitary Committee of the Municipality, and did not leave the city throughout this period. Indeed, he visited daily every part of the city and saw to it that it was swept and kept clean. The Municipal employees were greatly impressed by his conduct and thereafter a new spirit pervaded the whole municipal administration.

In 1917-18, famine stalked the District of Ahmedabad. Famine relief work was organized by the Gujarat Sabha. Vallabhbhai took an active part and organized relief so effectively that a tradition was created for work of this nature in the Province. When Gandhiji received the report of this work in Champaran he was very pleased and wrote congratulating Vallabhbhai. The following year in 1918, an influenza epidemic attacked the city and the Gujarat Sabha organized a special hospital and made arrangements for the distribution of medicines in people's homes.

1914-18 was the period of the First World War and in 1917 and in the early part of 1918, the strength of the German offensive was such that Britain's resources were severely strained, and she looked all round for assistance. Towards the end of 1917, the Secretary of State for India, Mr Montague, made a very persuasive statement in regard to the future constitutional progress of India. The British administration in India, he said had become very wooden and would be changed as soon as the war was over, and responsible self-government would be given to Indians. Thereafter he came personally to see for himself the conditions in the country and discuss with the Viceroy and the various Provincial Governors, senior officers and political leaders of different parties, the nature of the reforms that were to be made. Along with other leaders he also saw Gandhiji. Gandhiji had intended at one time when he went to see Montague to hand over to him personally a

petition signed by at least a lakh of people demanding self-government. The Gujarat Sabha undertook the task of obtaining the necessary signatures.

Owing to excessive rains in 1917, the crops had failed in the Kheda District and the Gujarat Sabha was compelled to support the request of the cultivators for the postponement of collection of land revenue. Gandhiji assumed leadership of this movement and it was during this fight that Vallabhbhai took part actively for the first time in a political movement.

At the Congress session of 1920 at Nagpur, the objectives of the Congress were clarified and its constitution was re-drafted. In accordance with that decision Provincial Congress Committees were re-organized and the Gujarat Sabha was replaced by the Gujarat Provincial Congress Committee with Vallabhbhai as its Chairman, and Yagnik and Mavlankar as Secretaries. The Gujarat Provincial Committee did not confine its activities solely to political work but, under Gandhiji's influence, extended its field to the whole of the public life of Gujarat. It has always rendered most active and effective assistance in facing unforeseen catastrophies like famines and epidemics.

CHAPTER IX

KHEDA SATYAGRAHA—1

Investigation and Relief

In the monsoon of 1917, there was excessive rain in Kheda District. Instead of the usual 30 inches, there was a rainfall of almost 70 inches that year. The first sowings were washed away by rain, and as it kept on raining even after Dussehra *, no time was left for the second sowings. Excessive water damaged even the fodder crop, and so the monsoon crops were a complete failure. Whenever there is heavy rainfall, normally the prospects for the winter or rabbi crop are good, but that year, that too was not to be, for an epidemic of rats and of other pests caused heavy damage to what might otherwise have been excellent crops. Thus all the crops of the year had failed and there was the unusual phenomenon of a 'green' famine. When rains fail, and there is, what is called, a dry famine, everyone is seriously concerned. The Government appreciates readily the need for relief both in regard to land revenue and in other ways; while the wealthier sections of the public come forward spontaneously with organizations for famine relief. But in a wet famine, although the conditions in the affected area are scarcely less grave, neither the public, nor the Government appreciate as readily and as easily the seriousness of the situation. Relief measures get under way late, while revenue officers of the Government do not realize that the need for relief in regard to land revenue payments and similar monetary assistance is as necessary as when crops fail for want of rain. In the ryotwari land of the Bombay State, remissions and postponements of land revenue dues are given to cultivators on the basis of an estimate which is made every year of the out-turn of the crops. If the crop is

* Dussehra comes 20 days before Diwali, the festival of lights. It falls any time between September and late October. This year, it was in October.

considered to be less than $37\frac{1}{2}$ per cent but more than 25 per cent, the cultivators are allowed to pay half their land revenue assessment a year later; if the out-turn is estimated at less than 25 per cent, the collection of the entire assessment is postponed. If the crops fail in the following year, the portion of the land revenue, postponed in the previous year, is remitted altogether. Hitherto, the people, through ignorance and poverty had never questioned the Government's decisions in this matter, and this time, too, would probably have quietly accepted the Government's estimate of the crop out-turn.

But this time, a champion of their rights had come forward and having obtained the support and blessings of Gandhiji and Vallabhbhai, was prepared to take up cudgels on their behalf. Mohanlal Pandya of Kathalal, a village in Kheda District, was this champion.

Had the Revenue officers been wise and advised the Government correctly, there can be little doubt but that a solution acceptable to all would have been found. Indeed, all that was immediately called for was the sympathetic gesture of postponing collection of land revenue dues for a year. The loss to the Government would have been no more than the loss of interest on the amount; but Government officers did not look at the matter that way. Obsessed by notions of prestige they felt that whatever they decided in the matter of land revenue must be accepted as final. Their argument, if they ever argued consciously, appeared to be somewhat as follows: The Government is paternal, it knows best the requirements and wants of the agriculturist, and seeks nothing but his welfare. On the other hand, all these people who now claim to talk on behalf of the agriculturists are lawyers and political agitators from cities. In a sense, therefore, the point in dispute was, who were the real well-wishers of the agriculturists? were they the Government and its officers, or the non-official public workers? The contention of the Government officers was that the agriculturists were complaining only because they had been instigated and their emotions worked upon by agitators. So if the

Government accepted the demands of the agriculturists it would be the agitators who would gain in reputation, while the reputation of the officers would decline. Thus, to Government officers the fight on this occasion was one chiefly of prestige. The agriculturists, on the other hand, had become so conscious of their rights and their grievances that they felt that it was an insult to them if everything that they urged in regard to their experiences and sufferings were dismissed as untrue, without a thorough enquiry and detailed investigation into facts. They were prepared to accept any decision given by an independent arbitrator. The Government servants for their part felt that if an arbitrator were appointed, their authority would be lowered in public estimation.

On the 15th November 1917, the New Year day *, at Pandya's instance, the agriculturists of Kathalal submitted an application, in which they urged that since, owing to heavy rainfall, the crop was less than 25 per cent, the Government should postpone the recovery of land revenue. The application depicted the conditions throughout the District very accurately and similar applications signed by some 18,000 agriculturists from a number of villagers were sent to the Government. The Nadiad and Kathalal Home Rule Leagues sent one separately signed by several thousands of their members. The Bombay Government replied that the Collector had full authority to deal with this matter and that the various points of principles raised by them would be borne in mind. The people felt this was blatant evasion.

Land revenue collections were due to begin on the 5th December in Kapadvanj and Thasra talukas. A small but representative deputation waited upon the Collector on the 27th November and requested him to postpone the dates of recovery until a decision was reached on the applications submitted by them to the Government. The Collector

* Hindus in Gujarat in particular observe their New Year Day on the 1st day of Kartik. The Indian calendar follows the moon, and hence it comes on a different day and month according to the Roman calendar each year.

temporized. He did not agree that the winter crop would be bad, but promised to give whatever relief was found to be required when crop estimates were completed.

Meantime, meetings were organized from village to village, Gandhiji was kept informed of the progress of the movement, and from Champaran, where he was at the time, he wrote, advising the workers to observe the greatest restraint, to use courteous language in their discussions and speeches and, above all, to adhere strictly to facts. At a meeting in Nadiad on the 25th of November, it was decided to request the members elected by Gujarat to the Legislatures, Gokuldas Parekh and Vithalbhai Patel, to take up this question and secure relief for the hard-pressed agriculturists.

Accordingly, Gokuldas Parekh and Vithalbhai Patel came to Nadiad on the 12th December. Before seeing the Collector on behalf of the people, they visited about 20 villages in Kapadvanj and Thasra talukas and saw for themselves the state of affairs. They collected what written proof they could from a large number of farmers. They attended public meetings and listened to the accounts given vividly, yet in unadorned language, by the farmers of the losses they had suffered through the failure of the monsoon and the winter crops. Only after they had thus satisfied themselves in regard to the facts of the situation, did they see the District Collector at Thasra along with the representatives of the agriculturists. They submitted a written statement, in which they suggested that the poorer agriculturists, i.e. those who paid less than Rs 30/- as land revenue, and in particular those belonging to backward classes should be exempted altogether from payment of land revenue, and that land revenue collections from all others should be postponed for a year. The Collector replied that great care would be taken in preparing the crop estimate statements, and relief would be given according to the rules in the most generous manner possible. He agreed also to postpone in the meantime any penal action against landholders who had failed to pay up their assessment within the fixed dates.

On the 22nd December, the Collector announced his decision that land revenue collections from 104 villages, amounting to Rs 1,75,000, would be postponed. But the orders giving this small relief were not immediately communicated to those affected by it. The total land revenue collections of the district were approximately 23 lakhs and the relief given was thus approximately only 7.4 per cent.

Those were days when if any agitation was started against Government orders, Government officers, especially those of the lower ranks, considered it their duty to suppress it with vigour and violence. They used to regard these as opportunities to prove their loyalty and their ability. This was understandable, for the British made it a point of recognizing the services rendered by their officers of all ranks during such periods of popular discontent. On this occasion, too, some village and revenue officers took it into their heads to harass the people. On hearing of stories of the tyranny of the *talatis*,* the Home Rule League of Kathalal sent a delegation to the affected villages to ascertain the facts. A Muslim farmer reported to this committee that there had been brutal behaviour in his village. For two days the people had been unable even to eat their food. The *talati* used language of the foulest kind, and the presence of women did not deter him from using grossly abusive terms. He asked them to pay up their assessment, even if in order to do so, they had to sell their homes, their jewels, their land, their cattle and even their wives and children. Simultaneously, officers continued to force people to contribute to War Loans.

On reading the story of the conduct of the *talati*, Thakkarbapa † went to Kathalal and after ascertaining the facts for himself addressed a letter to *The Times of India* thus:

> "I visited some 10 villages and am satisfied that the monsoon crop has completely failed, and that even the *rabbi* crop is unlikely to be anything but poor as it has been attacked by a number

* The *talati* is an important village revenue officer, concerned with the collection of land revenue.

† Amritlal V. Thakkar of the Servants of India Society and one of the most devoted of workers in the Harijan cause.

of pests, and rats have eaten up whatever remained! Another grave complaint of the people is that under pressure from the taluka revenue officers, the crop estimate figures prepared by the *talatis* are unduly high. Where the crop was less than 25%, it has been estimated to be 26, 32 and sometimes even 50%. I made particularly full inquiry regarding the complaints of the people against the *talatis*. It is proved that one agriculturist had to sell his land; another had to borrow money at 75 per cent interest; six Harijan cultivators were made to hold their toes for 2 hours and were released only when they promised to pay up their land revenue dues. These men were obliged to borrow money at 37½ per cent interest. Many others were kept imprisoned illegally until they gave a promise to pay up their land revenue. Not merely is the land revenue for the current year being recovered, but even *taqavi* *, which was given in 1912, is being collected! One Muslim cultivator was compelled to marry off his 10 year old daughter, so as to borrow 15 rupees from his son-in-law in order to pay up his revenue dues. On making inquiries from other people of his community, I learnt that if he had taken this money for giving his daughter in marriage and used it for any purpose other than that of paying up land revenue, he would have been outcasted."

An idea of the way in which taluka officers encouraged village officers to take stringent measures will be obtained from the following circular which was issued on the 1st of January 1918 by the Mamlatdar § of Kapadvanj Taluka to his village officers:

"(1) The Collector's orders for the recovery of land revenue have already been sent to you. You must explain to the people that there will be no change in the sums fixed for recovery and that if the assessment is not paid very stringent steps will be taken.

"(2) If Police Patels † and Matadar Patels ‡ do not pay their land revenue in accordance with the Matadari Law, they may be

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* Taqavi means loans or advances given to cultivators for purchase of seeds, bullocks, reclamation of land, wells etc. These loans are repayable in easy terms and carry low interest.

§ Tahsildar.

† This is a village official who discharges certain duties as a police officer, in return for which he enjoys concessions in the matter of land revenue. Sometimes he may even be given a small grant of land.

‡ This is a village official with certain revenue duties and holds land under a system of land tenure which appears to be peculiar to a small part of Gujarat.

declared unfit to work as Police Patel and Matadar Patel. If within 7 days of receiving this order, any one of them has failed to pay his arrears, a report to that effect should be submitted immediately to enable suitable orders to be passed.

"(3) A note should be kept of persons who are advising agriculturists not to pay land revenue, and if any one of them is in arrears, a statement should be submitted for approval for the recovery of *chauthai* ‡ fine from them.

"(4) In respect of any leading person who does not pay up even though he has had some crop, instructions for the confiscation of his property should immediately be sought.

"(5) A note should be kept of all who, either on behalf of the Home Rule League or any other organization, advise landholders not to pay land revenue.

"(6) Special and persistent attention should be given to the work of recovering land revenue. If through fear or laziness, you fail to recover land revenue you will be liable to punishment."

This movement began in Kathalal village and no one from that village paid any land revenue. With a view to creating a split among the villagers, the Mamlatdar issued a circular on the 8th January to the effect that in Kathalal only half the land revenue and *taqavi* will be collected. But even so, the people could not be tempted into paying it.

The Secretaries and some other members of the Gujarat Sabha accompanied Shri Parekh and Vithalbhai Patel when they went to the district on a fact-finding inquiry. After receiving their report, the Gujarat Sabha wrote to the Government of Bombay on the 1st of January, urging the grant of exemption from land revenue in some cases and postponement in others. A few days later Gandhiji came to Ahmedabad. After he had studied the whole question and discussed all the relevant points with the agriculturists and members of the Gujarat Sabha, who had been to the district, he advised the Gujarat Sabha to ask the people to suspend payment of land revenue until a reply had been received from the Government of Bombay to their various applications. He also told the Gujarat Sabha to arrange for its representatives to see personally Mr Pratt, the Commissioner of the Northern Division, and to explain to him

‡ One fourth of the land revenue assessment.

the whole situation. A meeting of the Executive Committee of the Gujarat Sabha was called by Vallabhbhai at his house to consider this advice. The majority was in favour of adopting it but some of the older and experienced members were not prepared to accept responsibility for the consequences which may follow. To them, political activity had meant sending in representations to Government, holding meetings and passing resolutions; and on a slightly wider plane of public activity, they assisted in organizing relief to people in need. Gandhiji was particularly insistent that as a step of this nature was novel and unprecedented, the Sabha should ask the agriculturists to adopt it only if it was supported unanimously by all the members of the Executive Committee. The matter was discussed very thoroughly and several of the members who were lawyers raised a number of legal objections. For eight continuous days, the meeting discussed the proposal at Vallabhbhai's house. Gandhiji was kept informed of the progress of the discussion. Vallabhbhai endeavoured to persuade Gandhiji to be satisfied with a majority vote, but Gandhiji insisted on unanimity. In the end everybody agreed, with only one 'not-voting'.

Gandhiji's second condition was that if it was decided to start the movement in the Kheda district, one at least of the workers of the Gujarat Sabha should accompany him and devote all his time to the campaign until it was completed. As no one else was prepared to give up his other activities wholly, Vallabhbhai offered his services, much to Gandhiji's delight. The Gujarat Sabha then passed two resolutions, one of which requested the Government to postpone recovery of land revenue until a decision was taken on the representation made by the Sabha, while the other advised the people of Kheda district to refrain from paying land revenue until the Government made its decision. The Sabha was asked for its advice by people from all parts of the Kheda district on two points: what should be done to secure the postponement of land revenue, and what attitude should be adopted in the meantime when pressing reminders were received from the Land Revenue Department

for the payment of land revenue. The Sabha's answer was that no reply had yet been received from the Government of Bombay and until the Government of Bombay had taken a final decision, those whose crops had completely failed should wait and postpone paying their land revenue dues.

All the Mamlatdars had issued by the 8th January circulars similar to that which had been issued by the Mamlatdar of Kapadvanj ; indeed, they had gone further and made a few additions, which had the effect of even greater strictness and rigidity :

> "Mukhis * or Patels also will be held responsible for failure to collect the revenue."
>
> "Punitive legal steps such as *chauthai* fine, forfeiture, confiscation etc. should be taken against those who fail to pay land revenue."
>
> "Those who delay in payment of land revenue should be informed that their movable and immovable property will be confiscated and auctioned according to law."

On the 10th the Secretaries of the Sabha wrote to the Commissioner and asked for an appointment. The Commissioner replied that he also was anxious to discuss some matters with the Secretaries and invited them to meet him on the morning of the 11th. Although his appointment was only with the Secretaries, it was felt that on a personal request he might agree to see the other members of the Committee also. They, too, therefore, went along, but the Commissioner declined to see them. The Secretaries, Shris Krishnalal Desai and Mavlankar alone thus met Commissioner Pratt, and their talk followed the lines one might have anticipated.

> Shri Mavlankar: "We have been constrained to come and see you because of the very stringent measures which, we are informed, are being taken for the recovery of land revenue dues in Kheda District."
>
> Mr Pratt: "You young politicians have published this notice, but do you realize what it involves ?"
>
> Shri Desai: "Yes. We are fully conscious of it."
>
> Mr Pratt: "Have you had it distributed ?"

* Mukhi is a village chief.

Shri Mavlankar: "Yes. They were distributed in the Kheda district yesterday."

Mr Pratt: "If you will excuse me, may I ask how old you are?"

Shri Mavlankar: "30 years."

Mr Pratt: "You are still very immature and inexperienced and do not realize your responsibility; it seems to me that you have issued this notice without the knowledge of your President (Gandhiji)."

Shri Mavlankar: "Not only does he know of it, but it is published at his instance."

Shri Desai: "It was in fact drafted by Gandhiji."

Mr Pratt: "I am sorry to hear this. The responsibility for proper administration in Kheda district is that of the Collector. In this notice you are telling the agriculturists to ignore his orders. Do you realize what that means?"

Shri Mavlankar: "That is not our intention. Through this notice we are advising the public to postpone paying land revenue until Government's final decision is known, and we have given this advice only because they have been continuously asking us for our advice. It does not, and cannot mean that the agriculturists are asked to disobey the orders of the Collector."

Mr Pratt: "You are a lawyer; therefore you doubtless understand that every individual is responsible for whatever he does. The significance of this notice is that you want in effect to hand over the responsibility for estimating the out-turn of the crop to the cultivator, however unsuited and unreliable a person he may be."

Shri Desai: "I do not think that that is a correct interpretation of our notice."

Mr Pratt: "I do not wish to enter into further discussion. I understand the implications of the notice well enough. You are young and inexperienced. I would like you to give further and fuller consideration to the implications and let me know your final decision by tomorrow evening."

Shri Desai: "There is no need for us to give any further thought to this matter. And even if we were prepared to do so, you are giving us insufficient time. Our President is at the moment in Champaran in Bihar."

Mr Pratt: "I did not know that your leader was wandering about all over India. However I am not concerned with that."

Shri Mavlankar: "To reconsider this matter we would have to call our Executive Committee meeting, and that would not be possible in so short a time."

Mr Pratt: "What can I do about it ? That is not my business. If I do not hear by tomorrow from you, I shall write to Government recommending that your Sabha should be declared illegal."

That same day an emergent meeting of the Executive Committee was called and a report of the talks with the Commissioner was placed before it. The Executive Committee after due consideration resolved :

"It is neither unreasonable nor illegal to postpone payment of land revenue in respect of land in which the out-turn of the crop has been less than 25 per cent of the normal out-turn. Therefore, to advise the agriculturists of Kheda district to postpone payment cannot be deemed to be illegal, or uncalled for, or objectionable in any way. No other advice could be more appropriate."

A copy of this resolution was sent to the Commissioner, while Gandhiji was informed of the incident by telegram. In reply Gandhiji advised the Sabha to inform the Commissioner in writing that harassed by the village officers, some poor peasants were compelled to sell their cattle etc., in order to pay up their land revenue dues, and others found themselves in an even worse plight; the Sabha was asked further to keep the Government promptly informed of all incidents of harassment and hardships inflicted in the course of the land revenue recovery work. Finally, concluded Gandhiji :

"You must write to the Commissioner also that he may tell the Government what he likes regarding the Sabha. You must also protest politely but firmly against the insulting behaviour of the Commissioner in not seeing the other members of the Sabha. A strong movement must immediately be started for ensuring the postponement of land revenue and the suspension of the recovery work. This is the only correct reply to the arrogance of the Commissioner and the threat he issued. I am sorry that I am not there at this very critical moment."

In a letter Gandhiji explained his views further :

"The Commissioner has finally shown himself in his true colours. For the future, I would like you to note that when he wrote refusing to see the whole deputation, it would have been far better if even the Secretaries had refused to go and see him. Only if you have confidence in yourselves, can you stand by the side of the public fearlessly and advise them not to pay land revenue. You may be arrested for doing so, and you must regard that as the fulfilment of your work. That is Satyagraha. It is

only by that method that you will achieve independence. It is possible that you will not get it immediately, but it is our supreme duty to show the way of Satyagraha to the best of our ability whenever a suitable opportunity arises."

He wrote to the workers of the Kheda district also about the same time in a similar strain :

"I am greatly interested in your letters and I am particularly unhappy that at this moment I am not there with you. If we do our duty fearlessly, the public too will draw from it a wonderful object lesson. It is understandable that the officials are very annoyed. How can they like to see a public alive to its rights? I hope that none of you will lose heart. If on this occasion we do our duty to the utmost, we shall be well on the way to independence."

In another letter he wrote :

"Whether the Government admits the inability of the people to pay land revenue or not, if they are in fact unable to do so, that inability cannot be questioned. Why should they then pay land revenue? Let even one person remain firm; he will have won the battle. From that, further victories will follow."

Simultaneously, the Hon'ble Shri Parekh and Shri Vithalbhai Patel were doing what they could at the Bombay Secretariat. They met the Revenue Member, Mr Carmichael, and requested him to make an independent inquiry regarding the value of the crops. But Mr Carmichael replied very stiffly: "The Collector there is Mr Namjoshi, an Indian, and he has far greater knowledge of this subject than either you or me. He himself is fully responsible for this and Government does not propose to intervene." Thereupon Shri Parekh and Shri Patel requested that the enforcement of the Collector's orders should be postponed until such time as they could raise this question in the next session of the Legislature. The Revenue Member merely expressed his inability to accede to their request.

The Collector of Kheda issued a statement on the 14th of January in which he referred to the advice given to the agriculturists by the Gujarat Sabha on the 10th :

"The Collector has full authority either to recover land revenue or to grant postponement, and I have issued my final orders only after a careful investigation of the crops in the district. In some villages of the district where I felt relief was necessary,

I have issued orders giving postponement of a part of the land revenue. Landholders must now, therefore, pay up their land revenue and the outstanding *taqavi.* If nevertheless anyone influenced by the wrong advice, which is being given to them, refuses to pay up his land revenue dues, I shall be compelled to take stringent legal measures against him."

In addition to this the Government of Bombay, with a view to strengthening the hands of the Collector and the Commissioner, issued a statement on the 16th of January in which it laid particular emphasis on the fact that the Collector had given relief to deserving persons after a careful enquiry. Referring to the Gujarat Sabha, the statement said that it had its headquarters in Ahmedabad, many of its members lived not in Kheda district but in Ahmedabad, that though it submitted a representation to the Government of Bombay, before it gave its advice on the 10th of January to the public of Kheda district to refrain from paying land revenue, it had not sent in a representation either to the Collector, who had full authority in this matter, or to the Commissioner, nor had it sought an interview with the two officers. Moreover, the Collector's final orders had been issued before the Sabha's notice was distributed amongst the cultivators. It was difficult, therefore, for the Government to treat its action in advising the cultivators to ignore the orders of the Collector as anything other than thoughtless and mischievous. In this rich and fertile district, the Government would not allow any intervention in the normal work of the collection of land revenue dues.

On being informed of this statement by telegram, Gandhiji advised the Sabha on the following lines:

"Shris Parekh and Patel, who made enquiries on the spot, must give a convincing reply by argument and by illustrations. Press for an independent investigation. The movement has started from the people and you should prove that the intervention of Shris Parekh and Patel and of the Gujarat Sabha has been at their instance. That agriculturists who have to borrow or to sell their cattle in order to pay land revenue should not do so, is an advice which I would not hesitate to give. The Government may do what it likes. If the hardship is genuine and the workers skilful, they cannot but achieve success."

Shris Parekh and Patel and the Gujarat Sabha gave detailed replies to the statement of the Government. In particular with reference to the Collector's close and careful enquiry, it was stated that on the 15th of December he met Shri Parekh and Shri Patel. On the 19th the statements of the crop estimates were sent from every taluka to him and on the 22nd December he published his orders. How was it possible for him to have made in the course of three days careful and close enquiry into the condition of 600 villages ? The Gujarat Sabha went on to say :

> "It is difficult to treat estimates of crops made on the basis of a rapid drive by car or on the basis of the condition of crops in fields round about one's tents when one is in camp, as reliable estimates. Nor is it possible to judge the condition of the crops of a whole district on the basis of fields visible from a railway train. The Gujarat Sabha represents the whole of Gujarat, and many residents of Kheda district are its members. It takes interest in the public activities of the whole of Gujarat and claims to speak on its behalf. It is not desirous of inciting the agriculturists of Kheda district, but only to assist them in their time of difficulty. To say that a piece of advice which is given to the agriculturists in regard to their purely agricultural difficulties has any political basis is very strange, and it is a cruel joke to turn down a request merely by calling the district rich and fertile. In the last 40 years there has been a decline in its population by 11 per cent. Is that an index of the increase in fertility and prosperity of the area ?"

Until now Gandhiji had not taken any direct part in this controversy and had merely given, wherever possible, advice and guidance to the workers of Kheda district and to the Gujarat Sabha. But the recovery of land revenue was leading to ever-increasing repressive measures at the hands of Land Revenue officers. The attitude of the Collector and the Commissioner also had hardened. They seemed disinclined to make any concessions, and the Government of Bombay supported them unquestioningly. Though the hardships were so great and so genuine, the Government was not prepared even to grant what would have cost it so little, and yet meant so much to the cultivator, namely, postponement of the recovery of land revenue dues by a year. For reasons of prestige, it seemed determined upon

maintaining that agriculturists were entirely in the wrong. In the end, Gandhiji made up his mind to take charge of the movement. He arrived in Bombay from Champaran on the 4th of February and at a public meeting on that day said :

"I have come not to explain the conditions in Kheda district but to understand them. I had a hand in drafting the notice issued to the farmers of Kheda by the Gujarat Sabha and accept responsibility for it. That notice came to be issued when it was clear that the long suffering cultivators needed consolation and support. If the Commissioner had given the Government right advice, all would have been well. The appointment of an independent Inquiry Committee was the obvious answer. The Government may say that the circular was issued by the Sabha with some ulterior object. But the Government and officers cannot deny to the people a right which they claim for themselves. They have no right to take what they like from the people. It is their belief in such a right which creates all these difficulties. I must say very plainly to those who have told the people what their proper course of action was and is, now to stand by the people right to the bitter end. The people have only two weapons: either they may rise in rebellion or they may practise Satyagraha, non-violent non-co-operation. My advice is that you should practise non-violent non-co-operation and be prepared to face whatever hardships ensue. Therein lies the true Kshatriya Dharma or the duty of the warrior. I wish to prove to the British Government and to the world that it is with the help of this weapon that we hope to secure justice."

On the following day, that is, on the 5th of February, Dinshaw Wacha, Parekh, Patel and Gandhiji saw the Governor. With him was the Revenue Member, Mr Carmichael and the Commissioner of the Northern Division, Mr Pratt. The discussion concluded with an assurance by the Governor that he would write and inform them of his decision in two or three days. Gandhiji on returning to his residence wrote to the Governor :

"I hope that your Government will find it posible to agree to my suggestion and will appoint an independent committee. If such a committee is appointed, I strongly recommend that Shris Parekh and Patel be appointed on it. Both these gentlemen have taken keen interest in this movement right from the outset and no one will stand out against any decision approved by them. Dr. Harold Mann would be acceptable to all as chairman of the committee; alternatively, Mr Ewbank may be considered: his selection would be equally welcome. I am returning to Sabarmati

today and I shall remain there for two or three days. If you need me, please let me know."

On the 9th, the Secretary to the Governor wrote to Gandhiji :

"Neither from the discussion which took place between you and His Excellency the Governor on the 5th, nor from the accounts which have appeared in the papers, is it clear to the Governor that the local officers have in any way been harsh. He is not satisfied, therefore, that any advantage would be gained by appointing an independent commission. He is also anxious like you to remove all doubts and suspicions from the minds of the people, and he hopes that as a result of the detailed steps taken by the Collector and the Commissioner, of which an account was given to you on the 5th, you will have been satisfied in this respect and will assist all concerned in removing from people's minds their misapprehensions."

On the 6th, after Gandhiji reached Sabarmati, he was shown copies of all the notices and circulars which the Mamlaṭdars and the Collector had issued. He felt that the language used in these notices was unnecessarily stiff and threatening. He wrote on the 7th to the Commissioner :

"I have read some of the notices issued over the signature of the Mamlatdar of Kapadvanj. One notice threatens confiscation if land revenue is not paid before the 11th of January. I have seen several of the people on whom this notice was served. They appear to me to be respectable gentlemen. Their objection is one of principle. Many of these people are holding lands on special tenure. I feel certain that whatever the Government's final decision, the Government would not wish to take steps which can only leave bitterness behind. I have seen another notice issued by this Mamlatdar. In this an expression 'dandai' has been used in regard to highly respected landowners. This word can only mean scoundrel, and I must say that such language is unbecoming and unnecessarily painful in such a context."

Mr Pratt replied to this on the 10th as follows :

"The penalty for failure to pay up land revenue has been clearly set out in the Land Revenue Code. Nothing has been done against the law, nothing will be done against the law. I cannot understand, therefore, why you say that steps which have been taken in accordance with the law are steps which are irritating and must increase bitterness."

In reply to this Gandhiji wrote :

"I enclose herewith a copy of a notice issued over the signature of the Collector. I have marked on it the portion which I

regard as couched in unbecoming and unnecessarily painful language. That sentence insults both the Secretaries of the Sabha and those who accept its advice. I am sure that it was not his intention to use expressions which convey the meaning they do in Gujarati. I also enclose a statement of the Mamlatdar, the language of which too, you will see, is very objectionable. In regard to forfeiture notices, I must say that to confiscate land worth thousands of rupees for failure to pay a small amount of land revenue, is an unreasonably excessive punishment and can only be regarded as vindictive."

To this Mr Pratt sent a reply on the 16th as follows:

"You have used very strong terms regarding the language of the various statements. I have examined them all myself and I am satisfied that there is no reasonable basis for your complaint."

A meeting of the Executive Committee was thereafter held at Vallabhbhai's house to consider further action. It was decided that in accordance with Gandhiji's instructions, an enquiry should be instituted into crop estimates of every village of the district. It was becoming fairly clear that the people would be left with no alternative but to start Satyagraha. As all the members of the Gujarat Sabha could not be assumed to be believers in the Satyagraha method, Gandhiji started work on his own responsibility so that the Gujarat Sabha as an institution might not be involved. Those members of the Sabha who were prepared to join him were invited to do so on their own responsibility.

On the 16th, along with Gandhiji some 20 people, including Vallabhbhai, went to Nadiad and camped in the Orphanage. Until now Vallabhbhai had taken part as a member of the Gujarat Sabha, but now he gave all his attention to this work. He gave up his Western dress and took to purely Indian dress (i.e. *dhoti*, shirt, a half-coat and, what used to be known then as Bangalore cap).

Before setting out for Nadiad, Gandhiji wrote a letter to the Commissioner in the concluding part of which he said:

"I would like to re-assure you that it is not my intention just to start an agitation or to encourage a futile agitation. I am going to Kheda district in search of truth. I see that until the reports of your local officers are proved to be incorrect, you will

not pay any attention to our representations. Although, therefore, I have full assurance of reputable leaders of the district, I feel it my duty to verify the facts for myself. If you are able to postpone the land revenue recovery work until my enquiry is completed, it will help a great deal in reducing the discontent that has now spread among the people. I shall be glad if you will instruct the Collector to give me, as a public worker, as much assistance as he can. If you wish to send any representative of yours with me during my enquiry, I shall have no objection."

In the course of his reply, which he sent the same day, the Commissioner said :

"I see no reason whatever for postponing the recovery of land revenue until your enquiry is completed. I have no doubt that Mr Ghoshal, the Collector, will give you all necessary information and assistance if you ask him."

On the 16th on arriving in Nadiad, the workers were divided into groups, and each group was allotted a certain number of villages. They all started on their work the following day. They had been instructed to return to Nadiad with their reports after completing their enquiries. Gandhiji himself investigated conditions in 30 villages. Vallabhbhai's group also covered the same number of villages. By the end of the week, reports were received in regard to 425 out of 600 villages. On the basis of these reports, Gandhiji wrote to the Collector on the 26th :

"I am satisfied from the enquiry which I have made myself, and from enquiries made by other fellow-workers, that postponement of land revenue is justified, but if you are nevertheless unable to accept our findings, there is, I suggest, still time to have the whole question examined by a Board of independent men representing both the Government and the public. I see that several thousands of agriculturists have paid up the first instalment because of the severe pressure brought to bear upon them and some have even paid up both instalments simultaneously. In order to do this, many were compelled to sell their cattle. I enclose herewith a statement of the villages in which the crop has been 25 per cent or less and I trust that you will issue orders for the postponement of land revenue recovery."

A dispute arose over Gandhiji's method of estimating crop yield, which formed the basis of his statement to the Collector. Gandhiji had investigated conditions in a village

called Vadthal. Many of its inhabitants are Patidars *. They are good agriculturists, the land in the village is good, and they possess a large number of wells. In a good year these agriculturists are able to grow two crops. Gandhiji concluded after his enquiry that the crop of this village did not exceed one eighth of the normal yield. This was regarded as one of the more prosperous of the villages of the district, and as Gandhiji himself had checked the yield of the crop, he suggested to the Collector that he should come and verify the estimates of the crops of that village personally and allow Gandhiji to be present at the time. But the Collector ignoring Gandhiji's request carried out the test check without asking Gandhiji to be present and prepared a long note on the state of crops of the village. The original estimate of the yield of the crop was 75 per cent, and as the result of the Collector's unilateral enquiry it was placed at a minimum of 48 per cent. The method of crop estimation adopted by the Government was to take the total yield of the village and to divide it by the acreage under cultivation. The yield of both crops was added together. In explaining the matter, the Collector wrote to Gandhiji on the 7th March as follows :

"According to your calculations if the first crop in a field had failed completely and a second crop grows in that field with a yield of 60 per cent, you regard the yield from the field as 30 per cent. If that method were accepted the cultivator would claim to have half the land revenue postponed. If a second crop is taken from the same field, for the purpose of a crop estimate, it would be wrong to add the yield of the two crops and then divide it by 2. The right course is to regard the yield of the two crops as the yield of one, since the extra benefit received from the second crop does not make the cultivator liable for additional land revenue. The second crop is always more valuable than the first, and the expense is less. There is usually very little or no expenditure on bullocks or implements or ploughing. Only some slight expenditure has to be incurred on other miscellaneous items, so that practically the whole of the second crop must be regarded as net profit. There is another defect in your calculation of crop by each field. It is impossible to check

* The caste to which Vallabhbhai belonged : Patidars are regarded generally as among our finest cultivators.

the state of the crop of each cultivator and to estimate its yield. One must take a view of the state of the crop of the whole village. I must further point out that ordinarily very little second crop is grown in this district, but this year there is every possibility of a bigger second crop. If we take account of the loss suffered by the first crop owing to excessive rain, we must set off against it the benefit gained thereby for the second crop."

No reference whatever was made in this argument to the fact that the second crop had been the victim of several diseases and that there had been a pestilence of rats. In a statement which Gandhiji published, explaining why the movement had to be started, he quoted the conditions in this village, Vadthal, and said : "To my mind I have satisfactorily demolished the whole argument underlying the Collector's long note. His system of estimating the yield is completely incorrect, but even if we were to accept it, the yield of the crop in these villages would be less than 37 % ; according to agriculturists the yield is less than 25 %."

The Government officers were not prepared to accept any facts presented by the popular representatives, nor were they open to conviction. They started taking signatures from agriculturists by pressure or by persuasion on statements to the effect that the crop yield was sufficient for the purpose of paying land revenue. Gandhiji wrote several times protesting against these methods and sought to dissuade officers from adopting them. The Commissioner remained adamant. He wrote :

"I see that there is so much difference of opinion between you and the Collector that there is no hope of an agreement. I feel myself that your own and your friends' point of view is mistaken and that the Collector's argument is valid. In these circumstances, the right and the wise course for the peasants is to pay up the land revenue in right time. There is no justification for saying that their complaints have not been heeded. The agriculturist must give to the Government its proper share. I can only describe an attempt at opposing a law, which has been an exception even to the ordinary civil law, as just insolence. I know that you do not like this expression (*dandai*) but for action of this nature, the peasants of Gujarat use only that particular word. In India, to defy the law of land revenue is to take a step which would destroy all administration. To break this law, therefore, is different from breaking all other laws."

Thereafter, Gandhiji wrote to the Governor:

> "I hope that on the basis of facts ascertained by me and my friends, and having regard to the hardships caused by the epidemic and plague and enhanced cost of living, either the recovery of land revenue would be postponed or an enquiry by an independent board would be made, such as the one I had originally asked for. But if this last request of mine is ignored and properties are confiscated or sold, or land forfeited, I shall be compelled to advise the peasants openly not to pay up land revenue.
>
> "When I first entered Kheda district, I gave you the assurance that I will let you know before taking any extreme step. I hope that you will bear in mind the various facts which I have set out in this letter. If you desire to see me I shall come immediately."

The Governor replied on the 17th of March as follows:

> "The Government has been kept fully informed of what has been happening in the Kheda district and is satisfied that the Collector and the other officers of the Revenue Department while acting strictly according to rules and regulations have the interests of the agriculturists at heart."

With a view to giving one more opportunity for a reasonable settlement, Gandhiji wrote again to the Commissioner, Mr Pratt:

> "Before publishing the pledges of Satyagraha and before I hold public meetings, I would like to make one last request. Please announce that the collections of the second instalment of the land assessment will be postponed, insisting at the same time on all those who hold land on special tenures to pay up their full land revenue dues. This would have a pacifying effect, and to my mind, in the present circumstances, be accepted as a merciful relief."

The Commissioner replied that it was quite impossible to accept Gandhiji's request. After careful enquiry and taking all circumstances into account, he was of the view that whatever relief was justifiable had been given and should be sufficient. He had accordingly issued instructions to the Collector to recover the remaining dues.

Thus, all efforts at a peaceful settlement failed. Gandhiji had done his best to arrive at a settlement and continued his efforts until the door for any peaceful settlement was shut firmly in his face. And so began the first attempt in India to defy authority by refusing to pay land revenue dues so long as adequate and just relief was

not conceded. The people were very irritated at the hardships they had to suffer and were most anxious to make an active protest ; Gandhiji, however, persuaded them to have patience until all other efforts were first exhausted.

CHAPTER X

KHEDA SATYAGRAHA — 2

The Struggle

On the 22nd March Gandhiji inaugurated the "struggle" at a big meeting of the agriculturists at Nadiad. In the course of an inspiring and rousing speech he said :

"This is a very beautiful district. Its people are well off. It has delightful trees, the like of which I have seen nowhere else in this country except in Bihar. But Bihar has natural beauty while in this district beauty has been achieved by hard work and patience. The agriculturists of this district are both clever and industrious : they have created for themselves a lovely orchard. They can justly be proud of their achievements. Nevertheless, it does not follow that they must be called upon to pay land revenue even though their crops have failed. The people are steadily becoming poorer because of the harsh land revenue system, and many have been compelled to give up agriculture and take to daily labour.

"In fact assessment should be paid on the sale value of the crop ; if the crop fails, it is intolerable that the Government should forcibly recover assessment. But that has become the practice in our country. However truthful the people, and however just their case, the Government refuses to believe them and insists on having its own way. There must be justice, and injustice must be ended..... That people would tell lies for the sake of saving at most a year's interest — for they are asking only for a postponement of assessment — is inconceivable. It is an insult to all of us that the Government dares to make this accusation. I would, therefore, tell you that if the Government does not accept our request, we should declare plainly that we shall not pay land revenue and will be prepared to take the consequences.

"We must visualize what we shall have to face : the Government may recover the assessment by selling our cattle and our movable property, confiscate Jagirs, and even put people in jail on the ground that they are not law-abiding. I do not like this charge of lawlessness. How can they say that you are lawless

merely because you speak the truth. Indeed you are brave men and not law-breakers. It is an act of bravery to help one's poorer colleagues and for the sake of the principle that when there has been no crop there shall be no land revenue, to refuse to pay land revenue, even if you have the money to pay it.

"I cannot bear to think that people will break their pledge after making it. It would cause me very great pain indeed if you take a pledge which you do not mean to keep; I would, of course, have to fast. But it is not that that worries me; what would hurt me is that people should deceive me by breaking their pledge. In Satyagraha the most valuable thing is that we keep our pledge or word of honour at all cost. A promise or a pledge which has been taken in God's name must never be broken. I would not hesitate to sacrifice my own life if by that means it becomes possible for thousands of men to keep their pledge. I would not mind very much if people do not take the pledge; but once they have done so, then I would far rather that they cut my throat than that they break their pledge. The man who cuts my throat, I would urge God to forgive, but I would not ask forgiveness for the man who breaks his word. Therefore whatever you decide, do so with full thought and consideration. Only those, who are determined to carry their decision through, will triumph. It is only such people whom the Government will respect, for it will know that it is dealing with men who will honour their plighted word. A man who breaks his word is of no use to his country, or to his Government, or to God."

That very day almost 200 people signed the pledge of Satyagraha, and on each succeeding day, the number of signatures increased. An interesting incident took place on the day after this meeting. The Tahsildar of Kapadvanj Taluka served an order on one Shah Bhulabhai Rupji who had undertaken to move about in villages and do propaganda in favour of this No-revenue campaign. The order required him to appear in the Court of the Tahsildar on the 26th March 1918 to answer the charge under Section 189 of the Land Revenue Code 1879 for inciting people by spreading false stories regarding land revenue. On the day fixed Shah Bhulabhai Rupji appeared in the Court and when the case was called, Vallabhbhai stood up as the Barrister representing him and submitted on his behalf the following reply:

"It is stated in the summons that I am creating difficulties in the work of revenue collection by misguiding the people. But

I have neither given wrong advice nor have I incited anybody in an unjustified way; I do not think that the people have either misunderstood the situation or been made excited by me. I have given them only reasonable and right advice. I estimate the crop in my village to be a 25 per cent crop and, therefore, even in accordance with the normal rules, the people of my village are within their rights in not paying land revenue.

"Mahatma Gandhi advised agriculturists of Kheda publicly at a big meeting on the 22nd March that they should of their own free will refuse to pay any money both in order to maintain their self-respect and also to prove that their case was not false. I consider that advice to be sound and therefore regard it my duty to advise other people accordingly. I do not think that in doing so I am breaking any law or encouraging bad behaviour in any way. Nevertheless, if there is any breach of law, I am prepared to undergo the requisite punishment. I must, however, tell you that the Section under which you have summoned me is not applicable to this charge. Who am I, however, to suggest that that fact is not known to you? Nevertheless, since you have invited me to attend, I have come, and I am grateful to you. Whether you will make me still more grateful by sending me to jail is for you to decide."

When he saw Vallabhbhai stand up on behalf of Bhulabhai, the Tahsildar was non-plussed, and when he heard this reply he said at once that no offence had been committed and Bhulabhai could go. Thereupon Bhulabhai, at Vallabhbhai's instance, enquired if it was an offence to advise people not to pay land revenue; to this the Tahsildar's reply was: 'No, you can say what you like'. But after Vallabhbhai and Bhulabhai had left, the Tahsildar recorded a note, which, as was discovered later, was in a very different vein:

"Shah Bhulabhai Rupji appeared in court with Barrister Vallabhbhai J. Patel and submitted the following written statement. It is clear from that statement that he is a member of the Home Rule League. I have persuaded him not to interfere in the work of land revenue collection and have permitted him to go. Papers may be filed."

Soon after this Gandhiji published a detailed statement in the press to explain why and under what circumstances he was compelled to start this movement and what were the points at issue. The following is the concluding portion of that statement:

"The Land Revenue Code gives to revenue officials unlimited authority. The public has no right of redress or appeal against a decision of a Land Revenue Official. The people are, thus, fighting for a principle while the officials are fighting for their prestige. The agriculturists of Kheda have ventured to take up cudgels in the interests of justice and truth. I request journalists and popular leaders to give them every help. Let no one forget that the plague this year has taken a terrible toll of the people of Kheda district. Even today people are living in temporary cottages in fields and outside the villages. Although prices have gone up, as the crops have failed, the agriculturists have not benefitted from these higher prices and have on the contrary to face all the evils of high prices. Nevertheless, what they require is not money. They ask with one voice only for the support and sympathy of the country."

Almost immediately thereafter Gandhiji had to go to Indore to preside over the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan. In his absence Vallabhbhai took over charge. On the 30th March another big meeting of the agriculturists of the district was called at Nadiad. At that meeting many leading members of the Home Rule League of Bombay were present. In a characteristically fighting speech Vallabhbhai warned:

"This fight will act as a spark which will set the whole country afire. Happiness cannot be obtained without undergoing trials and tribulations, and if per chance you get happiness easily, it does not last very long. A State ought to be proud of a people who are strong and determined. There is nothing to be gained from the loyalty of a cowardly and cringing public. The loyalty which you get from a fearless and self-respecting people is the loyalty which a Government should welcome. The Government has granted postponement for land revenue of Rs 1¾ lakhs out of a total assessment of Rs 23 lakhs. The first instalment has also been nearly paid. Thus only a sum of about Rs 10 lakhs remains to be paid. It might be thought that if we collected this much from Bombay or from Gujarat and paid it to the Government, the people would be saved much hardship. The brave man, who has inspired this fight, however, is capable of converting the cowardly into the bravest of persons, and in India Kheda district is the land of brave men. They will not think in terms of receiving assistance in this manner. There is no real advantage to be gained from such monetary assistance. It may, of course, postpone hardship for a while. But it is only if you are prepared to face hardships now and get the Government to change its policy, that you can remove this source of hardship for all time."

While Gandhiji was in Indore, land worth thousands of rupees belonging to certain leading persons of the village Vadthal was confiscated because they had failed to pay land revenue. On his return Gandhiji advised them to go on cultivating their fields as if the confiscation notices had not been served on them. Government officers thought that the confiscation would frighten the agriculturists and they would come cringing to them to pay their land revenue. They found instead that the peasants not only ignored the confiscation notices, but became more determined than ever in their objective. The revenue officers thereupon proceeded to auction their movable property and recovered the land revenue.

This compelled Gandhiji, Vallabhbhai and other workers all the more to go from village to village heartening the people and strengthening their determination to stand by their pledges. The people of the Kheda district and the public workers of Gujarat received very valuable training thereby. The qualities of leadership were innate in Vallabhbhai, but in this campaign he worked as a soldier. He spoke seldom. He watched closely Gandhiji's method of work. He observed carefully the way in which he carried on his correspondence with officials and conducted his discussions with them ; he observed the way in which he kept up the morale of the people and tested their mettle ; and above all noted the way in which at the height of the campaign he watched for an opportunity to secure a settlement. Thanks to the lessons he learnt and the training he received during this campaign, he was able to relieve Gandhiji later completely of anxiety regarding Gujarat. Gandhiji for his part was also making a close study of Vallabhbhai of whom he said once, "Although he has been through the fire, he has to be tested yet further. I have no doubt that we shall in the end find pure gold."

In a meeting in Vallabhbhai's own village when Gandhiji asked for questions one person remarked that there were many in the village who were waiting to buy the land which the Government might auction. Gandhiji replied :

"This campaign is a campaign for people to become beggars. Those who are waiting with evil intention to buy land which is not theirs will not be able to hold that land. If the Government takes over any land, we shall fight against it. It cannot retain for any length of time land worth thousands of rupees which it may choose to take over for the recovery of a few rupees of land revenue. This is not an anarchical country but a country where there is the rule of law. The moment I am satisfied that this Government is run deliberately in an anarchical and arbitrary manner, I shall immediately become disloyal to it. Why should we worry about what happens to us when our land is taken away? No one is going to be able to have the land sold."

Vallabhbhai was deeply grieved that in his village possibly there was lack of unity of purpose and he said:

"When I see the condition of this village today, I am taken back to my childhood days, when the elders of the village carried themselves with such dignity that the revenue officers accepted their advice and sat most humbly in front of them. Today the position is quite the reverse and I see you frightened of officials. This is clearly due to lack of unity amongst yourselves. If even on an occasion like this you are not able to get rid of disunity when will you be able to do so?"

In spite of Government's many injustices and the innumerable little tyrannies of the lower officials, Gandhiji went about his task without any hostility and was courteous to all. Mr Pratt appreciated this very much. He asked Gandhiji for assistance in calling the people of the district together so that he could speak to them. Gandhiji immediately issued a circular asking the people to come to the meeting and listen to the Commissioner. On the 12th April some 2000 of the principal agriculturists of the district came together for a meeting in the open area opposite the Tahsildar's office. The District Collector and other Revenue Officers were also present. Gandhiji himself did not go to this meeting but sent Vallabhbhai and other workers. The Commissioner made a long speech in Gujarati and among other things said:

"I would like you to listen to me attentively and repeat to everybody what I say, when you go back to your villages so that what I say to you now may come to be known throughout the district; for what I am going to say to you today is not only for you but for the whole district. You have been given much advice by Mahatma Gandhi and Vallabhbhai Saheb and other gentlemen who

are working with them. They have made speeches from village to village but today I would request you to listen to me.

"The rights of the agriculturists are such that they can keep the land in their possession for generations. But those rights carry with them the duty to pay regularly the land revenue assessment fixed according to law. It is only on that condition that you can continue to enjoy the possession of your land. It is the Government who determines the assessment through the instrumentality of its officers and without the intervention of any lawyer or barrister. No one but the Government has the right to fix the assessment. It is not a matter of which the civil courts can take cognizance. No one can go to a court with a complaint that the land revenue assessment is too high. The agriculturists have no legal right to demand or to insist upon the postponement of the assessment. That is entirely within our gift. We issue orders after taking into account the condition of the crop and any complaints and objections that may be raised. After the final order is passed, there is no appeal. It is not a matter for Gandhiji or Vallabhbhai, and on that particular issue your fight will be in vain. That is what I wish to impress upon you and you must pay heed to these words, not merely because they are my words, but because they represent the legal position. It is not merely my order but that of Lord Willingdon. I have in my possession his letter which says that he will accept whatever order I will pass in this matter. You must, therefore, realize that it is not just I who am talking today but His Excellency the Governor.

"Mr Gandhi is a very good man, a very holy man and he gives you advice because he believes genuinely and honestly that it is in your interest. He thinks that by not paying up the land revenue assessment, you will be protecting the poor; that is what he was telling me when he saw me yesterday. But isn't the Government the protector of the poor? Is it the duty of your Governor or is it your duty to protect the poor? Do you not remember the days of the famine? In the famine of 1900, in the famine of 1902 caused by rats, I was the Collector of Ahmedabad and Panchmahal Districts. You will remember how many works had been opened by the Government for assisting the poor. I remember how many hundreds of thousands of rupees were spent for feeding the people, in building tanks and in giving *taqavi* loans. Those amongst you who are old will certainly remember those days. It is against such a Government that today your fight in this district is being waged. There is a big war going on in the world, and the circumstances are such that it is the duty of you all to give the Government every assistance. But instead of that what does the Government get from this district? Does it get assistance, or does it get opposition?

"If you continue this fight against the Government it will be you who will have to bear the consequences and not these gentlemen of the Home Rule League. They will not suffer in any way. They are not the people who will go to jail. When a movement of this kind was started in Africa, Mahatma Gandhi went to jail. In this country he will not go to jail. Jail is not a fit place for him. I tell you again that he is a very good and a very holy man."

"The Government does not harbour any anger against you. If children kick their parents, the parents are sad, but they do not get angry. Why must you suffer all this loss; forfeiture, *chauthai* fine, confiscation, the disruption of the Narva * right? Why do you want to destroy your property by your own hands? Do you wish to lose your Narva right? Do you not care for your women and children? Would you like to be reduced to the status of labourers, and what for?"

"I have 28 years' experience of land revenue law. Mahatma Gandhi is my friend. He came to this country from Africa only two or three years ago; he has spent the greater part of his life in Africa. He is well-versed in religion. Whatever advice he gives on that subject is sound, but in political matters, in matters concerning land and land revenue assessment, he knows very little. I know far more about these matters, and I shall be sorry to see you suffier the consequences of your ill-advised actions. I shall be sorry to see the lands of good Patidars confiscated. Government knows that there has been a misunderstanding regarding the rights of agriculturists. Therefore, the benevolent Government is giving you this final opportunity of listening to its advice."

"I have come here to give you this advice, and I have only this to say that it is the duty of the agriculturists to pay up their land revenue dues. Do not think that our Mamlatdars and *talatis* will collect money by seizing and selling your property. They will not take so much trouble. Our time is very valuable. They will not go to anybody's house to collect the money. I am not threatening you. You must realize that parents do not threaten but merely give advice. If you will not pay your assessment, your land will be confiscated. Many people tell you that that will not be so. But I tell you that that will be so. It is not necessary for me to take any pledge to that effect, but I have the authority to make good my words. Those who refuse to pay land revenue assessment will not get back their land. The Government does not wish to retain on their books such agriculturists, nor are we anxious to include the names of such in our records of rights. Once those names have been removed they will not be re-entered.

"Now, let me tell you one more thing in conclusion. If

* Narva is a system of land tenure peculiar to this part of Gujarat.

anyone, through misunderstanding or mistake, takes a pledge, he need not consider himself bound by that pledge. Such a pledge need not be kept. If you break such a pledge no one can say to you that you have sinned or have committed a mistake. The world will regard such a person as innocent. You will recollect what happened in Ahmedabad. Many of you may not read newspapers; therefore I will tell you. There was a struggle recently in Ahmedabad between the millowners and the mill hands. The latter had taken an oath that they would not go back to work until they got an increase of 35 per cent in their wages. But what happened in the end? When they realized that their pledge was not reasonable they could not adhere to it, they broke it and accepted an increase of 27½ per cent and resumed work. In the same way, I tell you that when you took this pledge, you made a mistake. You did it only because you forgot your duty towards the Government. You did not give full weight to the consequences of this pledge; consequences not only to yourself but to your children. Taking into account all this I ask you to think again and decide whether you should do your duty by the Government or adhere to your pledge and suffer the consequences?"

Mr Pratt was followed by a land-holder of Karamsad, who stood up and said: "This movement of ours is not designed to trouble the Government; but if we who are rich pay up our land revenue assessment, the poor would be compelled to borrow in order to pay up also." The Commissioner thereupon enquired if this was not a fight against the Government. "It is a fight; that is how Gandhiji describes it, and that is what everyone calls it." Saying that, he looked towards Vallabhbhai; whereupon Vallabhbhai stood up and said: "The agriculturist also says that this is his fight, but that does not mean that he is fighting just to harass the Government." As Vallabhbhai was going on to say something more, the Commissioner enquired if he intended to make a speech, to which Vallabhbhai replied: "I do not wish to say anything much, but I would like to remark on what you said about the mill-hands of Ahmedabad." The Commissioner said: "Certainly, you may speak, but today it is my say and so speak in my favour." Then Vallabhbhai addressed the meeting in the following terms:

"The Commissioner has told you about the pledge which the mill-workers of Ahmedabad took. I feel it is my duty to clear up

a misunderstanding, because I was one of those who intervened in that dispute. It is not correct to say that the mill-workers were forced to break their pledge. Right from the outset it had been decided that if the mill-owners accepted arbitration, the mill-workers would accept whatever increase the arbitrators considered reasonable, and would resume work. The arbitrators were appointed. On the first day of resumption of work the workers received an increase of 35 per cent; thereafter they accepted an increase of 27½ per cent on the understanding that when the arbitrators declared their award, whatever adjustment was necessary to be made in their wages to make it accord with the award will be made in due course. When this settlement was reached, our Commissioner was also present. He has great regard for Gandhiji and Gandhiji too has great regard for him; so have I. In that meeting the Commissioner told the workers: "Gandhiji will give you right advice. If you follow it, you will do well and will get justice." I am telling you the same that if in this matter too you follow the advice of Gandhiji, you will receive justice at the hands of this very Commissioner. If Government appoints a committee and has the facts ascertained, everything will be simple."

An agriculturist of Chikhodra got up and said: "I have seen the Commissioner today for the first time. He seems a very good man. He says that 80 per cent of the land revenue has been paid up, so only a small amount remains to be collected. The loss to Government would be only the interest for 9 months on that small sum of money. So if it will assist in maintaining good relationship between the ruler and the ruled, I who am a family man, would very gladly pay a thousand rupees towards that loss." The Commissioner replied that the Government was not in any financial difficulty and could do without charity. An agriculturist of Uttarsanda said: "I have received notice of forfeiture for an assessment of Rs 4/- which I have to pay. I said to the Assistant Collector: "Please forfeit land worth Rs 4/-; but is it right that the Government should take back land worth a thousand rupees for the recovery of four rupees?" The Commissioner replied, "Yes, that rests entirely with the Government. This quarrel is not one of four rupees; it is a quarrel over 36,00,00,000 rupees. If you fight about land revenue today the whole country will fight about it tomorrow." Summarizing, the Commissioner said:

"I have said to you whatever I had to say, and now the final decision rests in your hands. To a saint it does not matter what happens to his property, but please remember that you are not saints."

Mr Pratt's speech was designed to win over the agriculturists from what he described as misapprehension, and to protect them from the harm which they were doing to themselves. He made a really good effort to show his sympathy but he was not able altogether to suppress his official arrogance. He was regarded as a very clever and experienced civilian Officer, but it is only clever British Officers of his type who by their essentially imperialist attitude increased opposition to and dislike of the British Government in India. Their arrogance and their autocratic behaviour destroyed the devoted loyalty which even a person like Gandhiji felt towards the British Empire. It is possible that they were wholly convinced of the rightness of their actions but they were equally determined that the public had no right to protest against their "final orders". Their professed kindness and their patronizing outlook turned men such as Gandhiji and Vallabhbhai and many others into law-breakers and thus eventually destroyed the Empire.

Mr Pratt's speech was based on the assumption that land owners were only occupants. Such occupants might enjoy the use of the land from generation to generation, but only on condition that they paid up regularly and without question whatever land revenue assessment was fixed. If for any reason they defaulted in payment, the Government had the right to confiscate the whole of the land. This is not the position, however, in regard to any other kind of Government tax. If a person fails to pay up such a tax, the Government recovers from his property only as much as would suffice to cover that amount plus the cost of recovery, but in the case of land revenue, the entire land is confiscated so that the owner of the land loses it altogether. If the Government sells that land to someone else, he is not regarded as entitled to the excess amount which the Government may have collected over and above the land revenue

assessment due from him. That is the reason why the Government insists upon calling him not the owner of the land but only the holder of it. Gandhiji's main objection was to this assumption of the Government and that is why he kept on telling agriculturists during this fight, "If your land is taken away in this manner, I shall become a law-resister." This same issue came up later in connection with the question of returning lands confiscated during the Bardoli Movement of 1928 and during the Satyagraha Movement of 1930-32.

After the meeting, all the agriculturists who had come from the district went to see Gandhiji, and Gandhiji explained to them the significance of their pledge and assured them that if they adhered to it they were bound to win. He then issued a pamphlet in which he answered the various points made by Mr Pratt and had it distributed in all the villages. In this pamphlet, he commented on Mr Pratt's reference to the mill-workers' pledge :

> "I am sorry that Mr Pratt's reference to the mill-workers' strike in Ahmedabad is contrary to facts. By alluding to it in the way he did he has also committed a breach of courtesy, justice and friendship. I hope that this has happened unconsciously. If anyone in this world adhered to a pledge it was the mill-workers of Ahmedabad. They had always maintained that they would be prepared to accept any wage that the arbitrators fixed."

In the last portion of his pamphlet, Gandhiji dealt with the Commissioner's threats :

> "The Commissioner has issued many threats. He has even said that he will see to it that they do not remain empty threats. That means that he will confiscate the land of all those who have taken this pledge and will deprive even their heirs of the right of property to the land. This is a very cruel and stern threat. I believe that behind it lies very deep-seated anger. When the Commissioner's anger is somewhat cooled, he will be sorry for having uttered such a cruel threat. He seems to regard the relationship between the Government and the people as similar to that between parents and children. If so, has any one seen in the whole history of the world any instance of parents having turned their children out of their homes for having resisted them in a non-violent manner? The pledge you have taken may be a mistaken one, but there is in the pledge neither rudeness, nor insolence nor threat of force. I am still

unable to understand how punishment of this serious nature could be meted out for taking a pledge in a more or less religious spirit for one's own development. Such a punishment the country will not tolerate nor will it ever be acceptable even to British politicians; the British public would be horrified at it. If such gross injustice is possible in the British Empire, I will unhesitatingly become a law-resister. But I have far greater faith in British political good sense than has the Commissioner. And I will repeat what I said to you before, that I consider it impossible that you should lose your land for action undertaken with such pure motives. Nevertheless, we must be ready also to lose our lands. On the one hand there is your pledge and, on the other, there is your property. Compared to the value of the pledge, the total value of your property is as nothing. The heritage of your adherence to your pledge which your children will receive will be worth hundreds of thousands of rupees. For therein lies the real way for India to rise. I am convinced that you will never depart from the role you are privileged to play, and I pray to God that He may give you strength to adhere to your pledge."

Volunteers had to tour through the villages in connection with this movement and some had to remain for several days in them. Gandhiji issued certain instructions to them. Besides his usual insistence on truth, non-violence, friendliness, politeness, etc., he emphasized the fact that their resistance was not against authority as such but only against mad and arrogant exercise of authority in this particular matter. Therefore, it was their duty to assist officers in discharging their other duties. In order that they might not become a burden on the villagers he asked the workers to take as little service from the villagers as possible. They should go on foot as far as possible and not use village vehicles. They should insist on simple food and forbid the preparation of elaborate meals for them. "It is only in this way", said he, "that volunteers will be able to render real service." He further asked them to study during this contact with the villagers the economic condition of the villagers, their educational needs, the manner in which they used their spare time, etc.

Gandhiji was, of course, still hopeful of a settlement with Mr Pratt and with that end in view he asked for an interview. In reply Mr Pratt wrote:

"If you give up all your weapons and come to discuss, my doors are open to you, but my hands are tied by legal and administrative rules."

In reply to this Gandhiji said :

"I am a believer in Satyagraha. I would gladly give up my weapons and even my all for the matter of that, but I cannot give up my principles."

On the 23rd April a big public meeting was organized in Bombay under the Presidentship of Vithalbhai Patel.

In the course of a speech in which he gave a full account of the origin of the fight and other details relating to it, Gandhiji said :

"It is not barristers or pleaders who are behind this fight, but agriculturists themselves. After the conference at Godhra, some agriculturists thought that they must through their efforts protect their own interests; they wrote to me that they wished to ask for justice from the Government and enquired if I would help them. Thus this fight was not started by agitators from outside, although, of course it has acquired importance as a result of outside assistance. The highly respected members of the Gujarat Sabha went carefully into all the facts and satisfied themselves that the agriculturists deserved relief. This much support was sufficient for the people. I can testify also that every effort was made to convince the officers of the true state of affairs. Not only the men of Kheda district but women too have joined in this movement. Their presence gives an extraordinary importance to the meetings which are held in the villages. They say: 'Let the Government take our cattle and our ornaments, and confiscate our fields, but our men will not depart from their pledge.' My experience in Kheda and Champaran convinces me that if only the leaders move amongst the people and mix freely with them within two years very significant things can be achieved. I would ask you to make a serious study of this fight and to learn to understand and appreciate the people of Kheda district. Give whatever assistance you can by sympathy and by speech. We are not making unreasonable demands. We hope to arouse respect for truth in the heart of the Government so that it may be able to see the justice of our demands. Until justice is obtained the people will continue their fight."

It was Lokamanya Tilak who moved the main resolution expressing sympathy with the agriculturists of Kheda District and requesting the Government to postpone the recovery of land revenue until such time as the results of an independent enquiry became available. He said :

"This question which is agitating the agriculturists of Kheda District is nothing new. In 1896 a similar situation had arisen in Colaba District and we had a difference of opinion with the same Mr Pratt. On that occasion the land of many agriculturists was confiscated. The land belongs to the agriculturist, but the Government reduces him to beggary in order to recover a single year's land revenue assessment. The Government does not take much trouble to ascertain whether there has been a good crop or not, and it refuses to believe the people. It is concerned with only one thing, viz. revenue whatever the circumstances. The agriculturists of the Kheda District asked for justice but Mr Pratt regards himself as having the sole right to decide what the correct crop estimate is. An independent commission ought to be appointed to settle this very complicated and difficult question. All of us must support this resolution to encourage our countrymen of Kheda District who are now in difficulties."

After the meeting in Bombay, Gandhiji went to Delhi. At this time the Great War in Europe had reached a critical stage and the Viceroy had called a conference to secure the maximum possible assistance from the country. He had sent Gandhiji a pressing invitation but had not invited either Tilak or Mrs Beasant; the Ali Brothers were still in jail. It was Gandhiji's intention to go personally and explain to the Viceroy that he could not take part in the conference in the absence of these great leaders of the country, but when the Viceroy explained the urgency of the situation and his difficulties, Gandhiji decided not merely to participate in the conference, but even to support the resolution to assist in recruitment; and on returning from Delhi he got the Gujarat Sabha to endorse a resolution supporting the recruiting campaign.

In the meantime, on the 24th of April, the Government issued a long statement in which it stated that the enquiry conducted by Gandhiji was inadequate and unsatisfactory, and that the Collector had made most careful investigations. It said further that from most of the Talukas the greater part of the current year's land revenue assessment had already been collected and that, therefore, there was no need for an investigation committee. In this matter the statement ended :

"The Government regrets their inability to accept the pressing request which Mr Gandhi and others are making for an independent enquiry. The agriculturists really cannot claim to have the land revenue suspended or remitted. They can only ask for relief as a matter of concession; but even if we were to assume that the Government is prepared to appoint such a committee, it is clear that such an enquiry can be of little use, for final authority must vest in the Land Revenue Department."

After returning from Delhi, Gandhiji replied on the 6th of May to the points made by the Government. He contended that if the Government does not consider it necessary to appoint an independent committee it ought to agree to the postponement of collection of the extremely trifling amount of land revenue which had still not been collected. That it does not do so, he said, is conclusive proof of the Government's obstinacy for which the Commissioner was mainly responsible.

After Gandhiji went to Delhi and throughout the month of May the number of confiscations for recovering the balance of the land revenue jumped by leaps and bounds. But in most such cases, the forfeiture of land was cancelled and land revenue was recovered from auction of movable property. Referring to this Gandhiji said in a speech which he made on the 12th in the village Dhunda Kuwa of Borsad Taluka:

"Although we have not achieved complete victory we have nevertheless won. Mr Pratt has not been able to carry out his threat regarding confiscation of land. The Satyagrahi, of course, should not regard the failure of his opponent to adhere to his word as a victory. But a pledge may be good or bad. A good pledge should be adhered to even at the risk of death. One should fight to death against a bad pledge. Mr Pratt's pledge was bad. He had said that our land would be forfeited and the names of our heirs would not be retained on the Government records of rights, but he has not been able to forfeit the land. If he had done so he would have been cursed by the public, and throughout India the story of the tyranny in Kheda would have resounded. Mr Pratt has escaped from such infamy."

While the forfeiture of property was going on with full vigour, Gandhiji had to go to Bihar. This placed on Vallabhbhai's shoulders the whole responsibility for maintaining the enthusiasm of the people. He and his colleagues

worked continuously and very hard. It was necessary to give uniform guidance to the whole of the district and Vallabhbhai did this by means of pamphlets. In one such pamphlet, he said :

"A bitter war is on between the public and the blind administration. The Government is determined to recover land revenue and is using all the resources at its command. It has appointed special officers and has even recruited clerks of courts for the purpose. It has issued notices and orders of forfeiture throughout the district. It has auctioned many houses. It has imposed the *chauthai* fine widely. It has auctioned standing crops. It has threatened imprisonment. But in spite of all this the public has stood firm. If the officers tired, the Commissioner came to their assistance. He threatened with dire consequences all the agriculturists at Nadiad. He read to them the Governor's letter in which permission was given for the forfeiture of land, and stopped all auctions of movable properties. The agriculturists took all this cheerfully. But in the net result, the Government was recovering no money at all....So the Government gave up confiscations and re-started auctions of movable properties....

"In order to give the agriculturists as much trouble as possible, even when there was other property which could be auctioned, they took charge of milk-giving buffaloes and kept them in the sun. They separated them from their little calves. This reduced the price of the buffalo by half. Even so the agriculturists adhered to their pledge patiently and bore whatever hardship they were called upon to bear. Women found it difficult to be eye-witnesses to the bad treatment that was meted out to their carefully looked after cattle. Nevertheless they showed great courage.

"The longer the fight lasts the stiffer is the test which the public have to pass. But without such hardships they cannot have this unique experience. Many bureaucrats find they receive no welcome in any village. Persons who were obtaining whatever they wanted free of cost are unable now to get anything even on payment. Their attitude is beginning to change and it would seem as if they had a vague feeling that there was some truth in the people's case but they are helpless before the current policy of the Government. In such difficult circumstances if the Government oversteps the limits, is itself angered, and harasses us, we, for our part, should not act unreasonably, never be impolite or lose our temper but commiserate rather than be angry, and be always peaceful. Even the hardest heart can be conquered by love and the more the opponent is stiff the more should our affection go out to him. Only so, shall we be able to win. That is the significance of Satyagraha."

In spite of unceasing confiscations, the people remained firm and allowed their cattle, ornaments and utensils to be seized without opposition. Women took their full share of responsibility alongside of men. Their active participation in the campaign surprised representatives of Bombay newspapers who wrote expressing admiration for the courage of the entire peasantry. On one occasion even the Collector was moved enough to admit surprise at the remarkable determination of the people.

On his return from Bihar, Gandhiji went on the 3rd of June to Uttarsanda in Nadiad Taluka. The Mamlatdar immediately went to see him and suggested that if those who were well off paid up their land revenue dues, recovery from all others would be postponed. At Gandhiji's instance, the Mamlatdar gave this offier in writing. Gandhiji then wrote to the Collector at once saying that if an order to this effect were published and made applicable to the whole district and the *chauthai* and other fines were excused, the struggle would cease. In Gandhiji's opinion, this movement was one of principle and prestige, and its main object was to get the revenue officials to admit that their orders cannot, must not, be treated as unalterable. In that sense, even if one person's land revenue payment were postponed, it may be regarded as the people's victory. Just as the Commissioner did not carry out his confiscation orders so also if postponement were granted in this manner, it would amount to orders of the Collector being modified and substantially watered down. The people had, of course, suffered very much and incurred heavy losses but the self-confidence which they gained in compelling the Government to modify its orders through pressure of public opinion was in itself a great achievement. The Collector accepted Gandhiji's proposal and orders were issued accordingly. So on the 6th of June it was announced in a pamphlet over the signature of Gandhiji and Vallabhbhai that the fight was over.

Before this last pamphlet was issued, Gandhiji met the Collector and learnt then for the first time that on the 25th of April an order had been sent to the Mamlatdars

authorizing relief in precisely the same manner, and to avoid any possibility of a misunderstanding, it was sent again on the 22nd of May to the lower revenue officers for compliance. Mamlatdars were even asked to prepare two lists, one of those who had the ability to pay, and another of those who had not. It was strange that neither the public nor the workers were informed of these orders. Indeed, for a whole month after this order was issued, the work of confiscation went on with full vigour. It is difficult to understand why this happened.

In their statement announcing the end of the struggle, Gandhiji and Vallabhbhai said :

"The fight has come to an end but we have to say regretfully that there is no grace in the manner of its conclusion. Postponement has been agreed upon, but not in a generous frame of mind. If the public had been informed about the orders, which are said to have been issued on the 25th of April, many could have been spared the hardships they had to undergo. Wherever land revenue had not been recovered, landholders apprehended severe action, and in order to avoid having forfeiture notices served on them, they abandoned their houses and lived out in the fields. Women suffered a great deal which they need not have endured. They bore insults from impertinent Circle Officers and saw with aching hearts their milch buffaloes taken away....The officials knew quite well that the sole reason for the struggle was that the poor did not have the ability to pay their assessment. The Commissioner refused to take notice of their difficulties and in spite of every effort, it was not possible to get his 'no' converted into a 'yes'. His one refrain was that the law did not allow individual relief. Now the Collector says that it is well known that such individual relief can be given. Well then, is it being suggested that the public deliberately and obstinately wanted to suffer so many hardships ?"

"Perhaps the officials had been influenced by the hardships which were being endured by the public. They may well have recognized their mistake but instead of admitting freely that they had made a mistake and acting generously, they now state that relief would be given on the merits of each case, suggesting at the same time that this is what they had always been prepared to do. It is because of this attitude that we say that the settlement has not left a good taste in one's mouth.

"Nevertheless we welcome the settlement since our request has been accepted. Now only 8 per cent of the land revenue remains to be recovered. Until today it was a matter of honour

not to pay up the land revenue; now it will be a matter of honour to pay it up. Whoever has the means to pay, should do so and thereby show that where there is no conflict between man-made law and spiritual law, the Satyagrahi (a soldier in the battle of truth) has no hesitation in honouring man-made law. In preparing the list of those who are unable to pay up the land revenue, we should be very careful to see that no one is included who can fairly be regarded as having the means to pay.

"By their courage the agriculturists of Kheda have drawn towards them the attention of the whole country. For the past six months they have shown great loyalty to truth, fearlessness, unity, firmness and self-sacrifice. We hope that they will develop these great qualities still further and bring credit to their motherland. The public of Kheda have rendered great service to themselves, to the struggle for independence, and to the State."

The end of the fight was completely graceless and the officers were in no way repentant. Indeed, they seemed anxious to seize any opportunity they could to harass the public. This became apparent even during the period that the settlement was being implemented. The Government had forfeited the land of a cultivator and had even confiscated the crop in one of his fields. As in the notice of forfeiture the number of the field was not shown, Gandhiji pointed out to the Collector that the field in question could not be regarded as having been forfeited. On this field there was an onion crop worth approximately Rs 600/-. As the monsoon was about to break, Gandhiji advised the agriculturists, with a view to saving the crop, to take out the onions. In order to encourage the people to do this Shri Mohanlal Pandya went to Nawagam and under his leadership nearly 200 people started digging up the onions. The Mamlatdar immediately went to the field, charged Shri Pandya and 4 leaders of Nawagam with theft of onions, arrested them and took possession of the onions. All of them were sentenced to imprisonment; two to 10 days and Pandya and two others to 20 days' imprisonment. Gandhiji and Vallabhbhai were present when the case was tried. Three to four hundred other persons were also present. Addressing the spectators outside the court, Gandhiji said: "This is a case in which I have no doubt we can win in appeal without any difficulty. It was not because

our case was weak that neither Vallabhbhai nor I asked a single question. We did not cross-examine witnesses, although any independent magistrate who had any knowledge of law would at once see that this was not a case of theft at all. Nevertheless, we shall not appeal. A Satyagrahi should not appeal. The right course for him is to undergo imprisonment. Bhulabhai who still has to pay Rs. 94/- as land revenue should go and pay it tomorrow to the Mamlatdar."

When the prisoners were to be released, Gandhiji decided that they should be received with great honour. These were the first persons in Gujarat to go to jail as Satyagrahis. In order, therefore, to welcome them as they came out of jail, Gandhiji, Vallabhbhai and others walked 7 miles. Pandya was given a great reception in Nawagam. Gandhiji and Vallabhbhai took part in all the meetings that were held in honour of the prisoners. It was after this incident that Pandya earned the title, "Dungri Chor" (Onion Thief) and was respected throughout because of it.

On the 29th of June, the end of this struggle was celebrated in Nadiad.

It was during this campaign that Gandhiji discovered Vallabhbhai, and between the two a lifelong relationship of affection and service began. Referring to it, Gandhiji said at the meeting :

> "A leader's skill is judged by the competence in selecting his assistants for the execution of his plans. Many people were prepared to follow my advice, but I could not make up my mind as to who should be my deputy commander. I then thought of Vallabhbhai. I must admit that when I met Vallabhbhai first, I could not help wondering who this stiff-looking person was, and whether he would be able to do what I wanted. But the more I came to know him, the more I realized that I must secure his help. Vallabhbhai too has come to the conclusion that although he has a flourishing legal practice today and is doing very important work in the municipality, he must become a whole time public worker and serve his country. So he has taken the plunge. If it were not for his assistance, I must admit that this campaign would not have been carried through so successfully."

CHAPTER XI

LABOUR STRIKE IN AHMEDABAD

About the time that Gandhiji set out on his tour of investigation in Kheda District, there took place a short but very important conflict in the Cotton Textile industry between mill-owners and mill-workers. It was a significant conflict inasmuch as good relations were maintained throughout between the two parties and quite important consequences followed from it. Vallabhbhai took an important part in it, under Gandhiji's guidance. That is the only justification for including here a brief account of this strike.

In the monsoon of 1917 when there was a very serious plague epidemic in Ahmedabad, mill-workers were given a bonus amounting to 70 to 80 per cent of their basic salary as an inducement for them to stay on in Ahmedabad. After the epidemic was brought under control, the bonus was continued as a compensation for the high cost of living. But later when the mill-owners decided to stop the bonus, the labourers, particularly those in the weaving sheds, were greatly agitated and pressed for a grant, owing to the increased cost of living, of a bonus amounting to not less than 50 per cent of the basic salary. When matters looked as though they might take a serious turn, the Collector of Ahmedabad wrote to Gandhiji on the 11th February 1918 and requested him to intervene. The mill-owners, it was felt, were unlikely to listen to anybody else. They had threatened to declare a lock-out; and if that threat was carried out, there would undoubtedly be serious consequences. Gandhiji met the Collector, the mill-workers and the mill-agents; and in consultation with them and with their concurrence succeeded on the 14th February in getting a tribunal appointed to determine the extent of increase in salary necessary to meet the increase in the cost of living. The tribunal was to be composed of the Collector as President, Gandhiji, Shankarlal Banker and Vallabhbhai as

representatives of the mill-workers, and Seth Ambalal Sarabhai, Jagabhai Dalpatbhai and Chandulal as representatives of the mill-owners. Even after the appointment of the tribunal, workers in some mills, owing to a misunderstanding, went on strike, and when their error was pointed out to them, they showed their readiness to return to work. The mill-owners, however, claimed that as the workers went on strike after the appointment of the tribunal, they (the mill-owners) were entitled to withdraw from the tribunal. They decided further to dispense with the services of any worker who did not agree to accept an increase of 20 per cent of basic salary. The weavers did not accept this increase and so the mill-owners declared a lock-out on the 22nd February. The representatives of the workers felt that it was their duty to advise the workers what would be a fair and reasonable increase to demand. After taking into account all the factors, including the interests of the mill-owners, they came to the conclusion that an increase of 35 per cent would be appropriate. They thought it best to obtain the views of the mill-owners on this proposal before asking the workers to accept it. The mill-owners, however, refused to express any view, and so the representatives of the workers advised the labourers to ask for an increase of 35 per cent and if that was not conceded, to go on strike. Thus, the conflict began. Gandhiji then proceeded to educate the workers. Every day he read out to them statements on a variety of subjects, and followed them up with oral talks; they covered a wide range of topics, such as the value of unity and of discipline, honour, courage, respect for manual labour, the importance of labour as compared to capital, and the sanctity of pledges. In this way, he sought to give to the conflict a spiritual tone.

On the 13th March, the mill-owners withdrew their lock-out notice and declared that they would give to workers an increase of 20 per cent over their basic salary. From that day the labourers' strike may be said to have commenced. The workers were determined not to resume

work until they received a 35 per cent increase. The mill-owners did everything in their power to break up the unity of the workers and to provoke them into violence. Many friends of labour recommended that a fund should be started to provide financial assistance to the strikers. To such well-wishers Gandhiji said: "If we give money to the workers in the hope that thereby we shall be able to keep up their resistance, what is the value of such resistance? The real significance of non-violent resistance is to be found in one's ability voluntarily to face hardships, and the more the hardships one is called upon to endure, the greater is the test." To the mill-workers he said: "You earn money by the sweat of your brow. Do not accept money from anybody in charity; that will not add to your self-respect. The world will ridicule you saying that you fought with other people's money." The strike, however, continued until a point was reached when the workers had no resources left to buy any food. Work was found for some of them. Earlier, Gandhiji had promised the workers that if during this conflict a situation arose, where workers were unable to get work and ran the risk of starvation he would clothe and feed himself only after clothing and feeding them. The time had come for fulfilling this promise. Gandhiji was very hurt when he was told that it was being remarked in some quarters that it could not matter much to him and his colleagues that the workers found it difficult to have a square meal, for they themselves had plenty to eat, a house to sleep in and a car to move about in. On the morning of the 23rd when Gandhiji went to a public meeting his wounded heart and his sympathetic eyes saw that instead of the usual 5 to 10 thousand men on whose faces shone determination and self-confidence, there were barely a thousand dejected men on whom helplessness was writ large. In a moment he came to a decision and announced it to his audience: "I cannot bear that any of you should break your promise. I will not take food or use a car until you have received the increase you have asked for." This had an electrifying effect. The determination of the workers to fight was revived. The mill-owners, for their part, were

moved greatly. Although they were of the view that the workers might become uncontrollable if their demands were accepted, there was so much respect and love for Gandhiji among the mill-owners that, for his sake, they thought that they would give to the workers the increase asked for. Gandhiji, however, would not agree to this. "No", said he, "you must not give anything for my sake; do so out of respect for the pledge of the labourers, and in order to do justice." Gandhiji's fast was undertaken to keep the labourers to their plighted word. Even so, he realized that his fast was bringing undue pressure to bear on the mill-owners. Nevertheless he decided to abide by it in order to bring fresh enthusiasm and determination into the struggle, and opened the negotiations on behalf of the workers. Many suggestions were made, but eventually it was agreed that the workers should accept whatever increase the tribunal considered reasonable, provided, however, their request for a 35 per cent increase was nominally conceded. Accordingly on the 4th day of Gandhiji's fast, that is on the 19th March, a compromise was reached. In order that the workers' pledge may be honoured they were to be given on the 1st day an increase of 35 per cent; on the second day to honour the word of the mill-owners an increase of 20 per cent would be given, and from the 3rd day onwards, the increase would be in accordance with the award of the arbitrator to be appointed by the workers and the mill-owners. Principal Anandshankar Dhruva was accepted by both sides as the arbitrator. As it would not be possible for him to come to a decision within three days, it was agreed that he would give his award in three months, and that in the intervening period, the workers would be given an increase of 27½ per cent which would be later adjusted according to the increase fixed by him. The arbitrator did not, however, have to go much into the points at issue, for even before he made up his mind, the mill-owners started giving almost 50 per cent increase by private negotiation with their workers. Thus, the conflict terminated with the maximum of goodwill between the two parties.

We can see today what good results have flowed from this settlement. Gandhiji carefully fostered the idea of referring points at issue in a conflict between capital and labour, to an arbitrator. The mill-owners and the Labour Union co-operated very fully in this, and on a high moral level. That is why today the Labour Union of Ahmedabad is a unique institution in the whole of India. Today the workers are not anxious merely to secure an increase in salary or an increase in amenities, but have begun to realize that labour is wealth as much as capital. Indeed, they see that their labour is of even greater value than capital, and hence their claim to a measure of participation in the administration of the mills.

Vallabhbhai learnt valuable lessons in all these matters from his working with Gandhiji to secure justice for the mill-hands of Ahmedabad.

CHAPTER XII

RECRUITMENT

We have already seen that after his return from the Delhi Conference Gandhiji persuaded the Gujarat Sabha to resolve that it would undertake the work of recruitment for the war. Later at Nadiad he discussed the matter further with Vallabhbhai and other workers. "If we wish to ask for all the rights of British citizens and if we claim to be equal partners in the British Empire, we ought to be ready to assist that Empire when it is in difficulty, in exactly the same manner as a Briton would do." That was a proposition which Vallabhbhai understood without any difficulty. But what impressed him still more was the argument that our people had become timid, and by joining the Army they would acquire both courage and manliness. Moreover for the educated and middle class people no other more convenient opportunity was likely to come to learn the use of arms and so it was the path of wisdom to take advantage of this opportunity. Many people, however, did not approve of this proposal, and were doubtful if it would be

at all successful. The class from which recruitment was to be attempted disliked the Government, and had had bitter experience of Government officials. Nevertheless, Gandhiji insisted on volunteer workers setting forth on this task.

Within a few days of the announcement of the suspension of Satyagraha in Kheda, Gandhiji brought out a pamphlet urging people to join the Army and both Gandhiji and Vallabhbhai followed it up by starting out on a tour of the Province. In Gandhiji's words, Vallabhbhai also became along with him a "Recruiting Sergeant". But the work was not easy. The people were not in the least anxious to support the British. During the Kheda Satyagraha people vied with each other in giving every manner of assistance to Gandhiji, and where one volunteer was needed four were forthcoming; now, however, it was different. But neither Gandhiji nor Vallabhbhai was likely easily to give way to disappointment. They decided to go from village to village on foot. As it might be difficult to obtain food in the villages, and as it would not be appropriate to ask for it, it was decided further that every volunteer should carry his food with him in his little knapsack. Being summer, it was fortunately not necessary to carry any heavy bedding. During this tour, Gandhiji lived mainly on a diet of roasted and powdered groundnut, gur *, bananas and the juice of two or three lemons. Sardar also lived on the same diet. Sometimes, Gandhiji cooked for himself and Vallabhbhai. Mahadev Desai used to bring them the daily post from Nadiad to Barejadi by train and from there had to walk 11 miles. Once he thought he would take some food for Vallabhbhai. Gandhiji said: "Do you think that Vallabhbhai is so dependent on others? He is quite capable of cooking his meals for himself and also for me."

The recruiting campaign was so unpopular that hardly anyone came to meet Gandhiji and Vallabhbhai in the Dharamshala †. So they had a restful and quite enjoyable time. Both in Nawagam and other

* Molasses, still very popular substitute for sugar.

† Public rest-house.

neighbouring villages, people attended their meetings in fair numbers but not in order to join the Army; they wanted only to ask questions and their one question invariably was, "Although you are advocates of non-violence, why do you ask us to take up arms? What has this Government done for us that you are asking us to support it?" One of the arguments which Gandhiji used in the leaflet which he had published on the subject of recruiting was that "among the many wrongs that the British Government has done to India, the blackest is the law by which the whole population was disarmed. If you want to have this law repealed and want to learn the use of arms, this is a golden opportunity. If at a time when the Empire is in difficulty the educated and middle class assist the Government voluntarily, the Government will naturally lose its distrust of them and it may be possible in future for anyone who wishes to bear arms to do so." The Commissioner did not like this but as it had been approved by his superiors he could not press his point beyond saying that on this matter there was a difference of opinion between Gandhiji and himself.

At first Gandhiji and Vallabhbhai secured very few recruits but later their efforts began to bear some fruit. As soon as 100 names were collected, they had a discussion with the Commissioner as to the centre at which these men should receive their training. There was no regular training centre in Gujarat and instead of opening a new centre the Commissioner suggested that the recruits should be sent to some other Province for training. Gandhiji was insistent that a training centre should be opened in Gujarat. His argument was that if the public saw prominent men of the Province learning drill, marching, shooting, etc., they would be encouraged to join, and by the time the first platoon was trained and ready to leave many more people would join. While correspondence and discussion was going on on this point, Gandhiji fell seriously ill. He was bed-ridden for almost two months, and while still ill, news was received that Germany was defeated and that there was no longer any need for recruits. Thus, this chapter came to an end.

It is interesting to note that it had been decided that Gandhiji would be the head of the 1st unit and Vallabhbhai his second in command. Gandhiji had declared that though he would go forward leading his unit on the field of battle, he would not carry any weapons.

CHAPTER XIII

ANTI-ROWLATT ACT AGITATION

The history of our struggle for Independence will show that while on the one hand we secured political rights progressively from the British, at the same time, on the other hand, we underwent great repression. The British appeared simultaneously to act along two distinct and opposite lines. Along one of these they progressively introduced political reforms conceding greater rights to the people, and along the other they followed a policy of repressive legislation, designed to destroy the basic rights of a citizen. Thus, before the Morley-Minto Reforms, which increased the number of popular representatives in the Legislature, were introduced in 1911, hundreds of people were sent to jail or transported with the help of the Seditious Meetings Act of 1908 and the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1910. Many patriots were sent out of the country under the provisions of a century old law, Regulation III of 1818. Lokamanya Tilak was sentenced to six years' imprisonment in 1908 for an alleged seditious offence, and when the new legislatures met, there were some 1800 political prisoners behind prison bars.

The Montague-Chelmsford Reforms followed a similar course. Even while the reforms were still under discussion, the police were given unlimited authority under the Rowlatt Act enabling them to encroach upon the rights of the citizens to an extraordinary extent. The agitation against those laws, and the civil disobedience movement which began, as a consequence, led to no less than 20,000 people, including some of the most important leaders of the country, being in jail by the time the new reforms were introduced.

In the same way, when in 1930 and 1932 the Round Table Conference was meeting in London to consider constitutional reforms designed to concede Provincial self-government, the authorities had imprisoned almost 1,00,000 followers of the National Congress which was the only really representative body and without whose co-operation it would have been impossible to introduce or work the reforms. And before power was finally transferred by the British, untold hardships and sufferings were inflicted on the people both before and during the movement of 1942 to 1945.

Although the Rowlatt legislation was something very simple, when compared to the laws and the ordinances which were enforced in 1930-32 and 1942-45, these were the first laws of their kind in India and so were opposed bitterly by every party in the country. In the Legislature too there was bitter opposition. Nevertheless, they were passed with the help of an official majority, and were immediately dubbed throughout the country as 'Black Laws'.

Gandhiji was just recovering from a serious illness and was still very weak. On learning of this legislation, his indignation was aroused. He told Vallabhbhai, who at that time used to visit him almost every day at the Ashram, that something should be done about this legislation, and when he was asked what he had in mind, he said : "If even a few men are willing, we must offer civil disobedience. If I were not confined to bed, I would start the fight alone hoping that others would join later, but at the present moment I feel pretty helpless and weak." The leaders of the Home Rule League kept pressing Gandhiji to give a lead. In the end, he convened a small meeting of some 20 people at the Sabarmati Ashram. Main among those who responded, besides Vallabhbhai were Smt. Sarojini Naidu, Mr Horniman, Shris Umar Sobani, Shankarlal Banker and Indulal Yajnik. A form of pledge was drawn up and all present subscribed to it. A new organization was created for the purpose of the agitation so as not to embarrass any existing organization. Gandhiji wrote to the Viceroy requesting him not to approve of the Rowlatt

legislation; he appealed through private and through public letters and urged that if there was no response from the Government, he would be compelled to offer civil disobedience. But it was all in vain and the bill became law.

As Satyagraha is primarily a matter of self-purification, Gandhiji decided that the movement should begin with a fast. Ordinarily Hindus undertake a fast of 36 hours, while Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset. Gandhiji, therefore, compromised and fixed on a fast of 24 hours from the evening of one day to the evening of the next. He asked the people to observe the 30th of March 1919 as a day of fast and abstention from work. Later, however, he felt that that would not give enough time for the news to reach all parts of the country and so he changed the date to the 6th April. It so happened, however, that Delhi did not learn of the alteration of the date in time, and so the fast was observed in Delhi on the 30th March. Hindus and Muslims acted in unison and the result was a complete and impressive strike. At that time, the people of Delhi followed the dictates of two leaders, Hakim Sahib Ajmal Khan and Swami Shraddhanand. Swami Shraddhanand was invited to deliver a speech in the Jumma Masjid; the authorities did not welcome this, and the police tried to stop the procession from proceeding towards the Masjid; when it refused to comply the crowd was fired upon by the police. Many were wounded and a few were killed. The whole atmosphere became very tense. Shraddhanandji invited Gandhiji to Delhi.

In Lahore and Amritsar the situation was no less grave and the leaders there pressed Gandhiji to go to the Punjab. Accordingly, after observing the fast on the 6th in Bombay, Gandhiji left on the night of the 7th for Amritsar via Delhi. However, before the train reached Delhi, he was arrested at the Palwal station.

The 6th of April was observed as a day of national protest with great enthusiasm throughout the country in cities as well as in villages. In Ahmedabad many people fasted and the strike was complete. In the evening at the appointed time, a big procession was taken out under

Vallabhbhai's leadership. It started from the railway station and on arriving at the river Sabarmati it took the form of a big meeting. After the meeting was over, the programme of breaking the law was put into operation. Vallabhbhai and others set out to sell two of Gandhiji's books which had been proscribed, entitled *Hind Swaraj* and *Sarvodaya*. People bought them at prices far exceeding the printed price, but no one was arrested. It seems that as the ban was on the older editions, the Government took the view that it was not an offence to sell or to buy the new edition. On the following day, copies of a cyclostyled daily entitled *Satyagraha Patrika* were sold without Government's permission which was necessary under the Press Act. Vallabhbhai's house at Bhadra was used as the press and publishing office for the paper. This also was not treated by Government as a breach of law.

On the 9th, the news of Gandhiji's arrest became known throughout the country and serious riots took place in Amritsar, Ahmedabad and Viramgam. In Ahmedabad, the authorities endeavoured to control the disturbances on the first day with the help of such armed police and troops as were in the city; there was considerable, almost unrestricted firing. On the 10th the number of rioters and their violence increased enormously; the police felt powerless; after burning down police stations and Telegraph Offices, the rioters went on to burn the Collector's Office and other Government offices in Bhadra; they did not spare even the big *shamiana* which had been erected for holding the Matriculation Examination. On the third day, troops arrived from Bombay and martial law was declared. Many people were killed and many were injured, before law and order could be restored. Throughout this period of unrest, Vallabhbhai and other public workers went from one area of the city to another and did their best to pacify the people, to arrange for the injured to be conveyed to hospitals, and to have food and other essentials distributed amongst the relatives of the injured and the killed. After the withdrawal of martial law, European troops were stationed near the Telegraph Office, the Imperial Bank and

the Gujarat Club in the neighbourhood of Vallabhbhai's house.

A Municipal Councillor, accustomed to flattering Government officers, informed the police that he had seen Vallabhbhai set fire to the Telegraph Office. A special C.I.D. officer was sent from Poona to pursue this charge. When the Collector heard this, he informed the C. I. D. officer that throughout the time in question, Vallabhbhai was with him and was considering with him what measures should be taken to control the situation. The Collector himself told Vallabhbhai of this matter. This is the extent to which flatterers used to go in order to please Government officers and the powers that be. The Police Superintendent of Ahmedabad, Mr Heeley, was so impressed by the part which Vallabhbhai played in re-establishing peace, that ten years later, he advised the Government that "without Vallabhbhai it will be impossible for you to maintain law and order."

Gandhiji was brought back to Bombay from Palwal and was released on the afternoon of the 10th. The news of his arrest had already reached Bombay, and rioting had broken out there as at so many other places. Gandhiji immediately went to the troubled area, but before he could intervene, the mounted police had dispersed the crowds. Gandhiji himself saw how many people had been crushed and wounded by the mounted charge, and reported the facts to the Police Commissioner. The Police Commissioner did not think it was wrong to use mounted policemen for controlling an unruly crowd. He went further and claimed that the police were in a better position to appreciate the effects of his teaching than Gandhiji himself could do. After asking Gandhiji if he knew what had happened and was happening in Ahmedabad, in Amritsar, and elsewhere, he roundly charged him with the responsibility for the rioting and disturbances.

It was Gandhiji's intention originally to defy the order that was served on him and proceed immediately to Delhi. On seeing the state of affairs in Bombay, however, he

decided to postpone his departure. In the evening he addressed a huge meeting at Chaupati and endeavoured to persuade the people to maintain peace, saying that otherwise he could not offer civil disobedience. The following day more news of events in Ahmedabad came. The situation there had evidently got completely out of hand. People had removed the railway track near Nadiad station in order to stop a special train which was said to be taking troops from Bombay to Ahmedabad. The Mamlatdar of Viramgam was burnt to death. These news made Gandhiji finally drop the idea of returning to Delhi and the Punjab, and he set out that same evening for Ahmedabad. He went straight from the station to see the Commissioner, Mr Pratt. Though the latter was very angry and indignant, he gave Gandhiji sufficient information to enable him to grasp the situation. He also agreed to Gandhiji having a public meeting on Sunday the 13th in Sabarmati Ashram and undertook to make necessary arrangements for the public to go there. Vallabhbhai read out Gandhiji's written address, wherein Gandhiji attempted to explain to the people how they had erred. Gandhiji declared a fast for three days as a penance and advised the public to undertake a day's fast. He also urged the people to admit their mistakes and appealed to the Government to forgive them their faults. Neither the people nor the Government paid any heed to his advice. Gandhiji finally announced his decision to suspend the movement until the people had learnt to maintain discipline.

In the Punjab, repressive measures of incredible ferocity were taken. The street in which a European woman had been assaulted became the scene of particularly repulsive and degrading 'retaliatory' measures. Everyone using that street was made to crawl on his stomach along its whole length; and this was enforced for several days. In Lahore college students were made to walk 16 miles in the heat of the month of April. In Amritsar in the Jalianwala Bagh, an enclosed place, a crowded public meeting was fired upon with the result that a large number of people were killed. As news of these happenings became generally

known, the anger of the people in the rest of the country knew no bounds.

For removing the railway track near the Nadiad Station, and cutting the telegraph wires near Barejadi, the Government ordered that special police should be maintained at both these places for a year and that the expense of this special force should be recovered from the Patidars of Nadiad and from the cultivators of Barejadi and Nandej. The irony of this order was that the Collector of Kheda, who promulgated it, had himself written three weeks earlier to the President of the Municipality of Nadiad, saying how very praiseworthy was the conduct of the citizens of Nadiad in having maintained law and order throughout this period of uneasiness and disturbances, and congratulating the leaders for their efforts in ensuring this result. What had led to this change in the Collector's attitude ? Apparently, some discussions took place between the Commissioner, the Inspector General of Police of the Province and the Collector, and a new policy was decided upon. It was on the 12th of August that the court delivered its judgment on the persons who were said to have removed the railway track, but well before the judgment was delivered, the Collector had made up his mind as to who was guilty and imposed a penalty on the Patidars and the trading community of Nadiad. The following summary account of the reasons in support of his imposing a special fine is interesting as an illustration of argument by assertion instead of proof :

" (1) There is no doubt that the people of Nadiad removed the railway track. Most of these were Patidars.

(2) Last year when the movement for non-payment of land revenue was being conducted, Mr Gandhi made Nadiad his headquarters; that movement reduced the respect for authority among the people..

(3) The chief reason for regarding the trading community as particularly responsible is that they not only inspired the agitation against Government, but by closing their shops, they encouraged the rioters. On the 6th of April

the first strike was declared without any rhyme or reason, and it was that strike which led to the disturbances on the 11th. Moreover, Gandhi, Gokuldas and Phulchand Shah are Banias*.

(4) The citizens of Nadiad were given an opportunity to help in proving the offence which was committed in Nadiad ; not one leading citizen of Nadiad gave me any information of importance."

Ahmedabad was fined 9,00,000 rupees, and the town of Viramgam Rs. 42,000/-. The Collector was authorized to exempt from this fine such citizens as he considered appropriate. Even so, Vallabhbhai and others who had, on the admission of the authorities themselves, given great assistance were not exempted. Commenting on this, Gandhiji wrote in *Young India* on the 7th July 1920 :

> "Shri V. J. Patel, a noted barrister, and Dr. Kanuga, a leading medical practitioner, were among those who were unable to pay. They had admittedly helped the authorities to quell the disturbances. No doubt they were Satyagrahis but they had endeavoured to still the mob fury even at some risk to their own persons. But the authorities would not exempt them. It was a difficult thing for them to use discretion in individual cases. It was equally difficult for these two gentlemen to pay any fine when they were not to blame at all. They did not wish to embarrass the authorities and yet they were anxious to preserve their self-respect. They carried on no agitation but simply notified their inability to pay the fines in the circumstances set forth above. Therefore an attachment was issued. Dr. Kanuga is a very busy practitioner and his box is always full. The watchful attaching official attached his cash box and extracted enough money to discharge the writ of execution. A lawyer's business cannot be conducted on those lines. Mr Patel sported no cash box. A sofa of his sitting room was therefore attached and advertized for sale and duly sold. Both these Satyagrahis thus completely saved their conscience."

An interesting episode at this time was the recommendation made by the District Judge of Ahmedabad to the High Court that Vallabhbhai and other barristers and lawyers, who had pledged themselves in writing to offer Satyagraha against the Rowlatt Act should be regarded as unfit to practise in a court of law until such time as they

* Members of the trading caste.

severed their connection with the Satyagraha Sabha. The High Court invited these gentlemen to show cause, and the case was heard before a full bench on the 24th July 1919. Sir Chimanlal Setalvad appeared on behalf of the lawyers and barristers. The substance of his argument was that it could not be maintained that to sign a pledge of Satyagraha was a conduct unbefitting the profession of a lawyer. It was not possible to charge them with any kind of misconduct because of the pledge. The pledge indeed proved them to be respectable gentlemen, for they had the courage to announce publicly their honest belief. It may be that that belief was mistaken, but clearly there was no moral guilt involved. The pledge says quite plainly that they must conduct themselves in accordance with truth and that no harm should be caused to anybody. How can a person taking such a pledge be regarded as dishonourable? In criticizing certain actions of their Government many well-known barristers in England had threatened to wage a war against it. Nevertheless, no one ever dreamt of withdrawing from them their right of practice. If our lawyers acted against the law, steps could properly be taken against them under the Criminal Law. The proposed step was premature, for so far no illegal act was said to have been committed by them.

The Judges of the High Court did not accept this argument but said 'we have no desire to deal harshly with them and for the present we shall content ourselves with giving them a warning. We do so because we are told that the Satyagraha Sabha has been quiescent since the riots of April. Whether we shall take any action later depends entirely on the development, if any, of the Satyagraha movement, so that these notices will be adjourned with leave to the advocate-general and the respondents to move for their restoration to the Board should occasion arise.'

Commenting on this judgment in *Young India* Gandhiji wrote: "The judgment of the High Court is, to say the least, highly unsatisfactory. It has shirked the issue. The logical outcome of the judgment should have

been punishment and not a postponement of it. The lawyers in question had shown no repentance."

But this warning remained a dead letter. Many lawyers and barristers not only took the pledge of Satyagraha in 1921 as also in 1930, but actually broke the laws and courted imprisonment and the High Courts did not take any action.

A Special court was appointed to try cases in connection with the removal of railway tracks, the cutting of telegraph wires, and with the other disturbances in Ahmedabad and Viramgam. In most of those cases Vallabhbhai appeared for the accused. Most of the accused were proved innocent and were released. One of these cases produced considerable amusement. A Patidar cultivator was accused of removing the railway track near the Nadiad Station and certain tools were confiscated from his house and produced in court as exhibits. The court decided that the Judge, the prosecuting pleader and the defending counsel should visit the scene of offence. Vallabhbhai wanted the exhibits to be taken along. After the site was inspected, Vallabhbhai suggested that the tools which had been produced should be tried, to see if they could have been used to remove the bolts etc. They found that not one tool fitted. And how could they ? For they were tools taken out of the tool bag for the pump of the accused's well ! The police officers looked very foolish. As Vallabhbhai remarked in court, this was typical of the evidence that was produced in most such cases. Since an offence had been committed, someone had to be arrested and put up for trial, no matter who.

CHAPTER XIV

NON-CO-OPERATION

As the Government had arrested all the leaders of the Punjab who were capable of raising a voice against its tyrannical actions in Lahore and Amritsar, the Congress decided that an independent investigation should be carried out, and directed C. F. Andrews, Pandit Malaviya, Pandit Motilal Nehru, Deshbandhu Das and others to go to the Punjab to make the investigation. They were not granted permission to enter the Province until July. Gandhiji himself was given permission only in October, and a few days before this, on the 14th of October, the Government itself appointed a Committee to enquire into the Punjab disturbances and the steps taken to control them during the Martial Law period. That Committee became known later after the name of its Chairman, Lord Hunter, as the Hunter Committee. Before, however, this Committee was appointed, the Viceroy had approved of a law exonerating the officers from the consequences of their actions and thereby, in effect, imposed a limitation on the authority of the Committee. The law provided that no civil or criminal case could be lodged against an officer in respect of action undertaken by him in the interests of maintenance of law and order. Another provision was that any punishment inflicted during the Martial Law period would continue until such time as the Governor or some other duly empowered person gave relief or set it aside. The Committee was composed of 5 Europeans and three Indians. The Congress proposal was that of the three Indian members, one should be a Congress representative and one a representative of the Muslim League. The Viceroy turned it down as also another proposal of the Congress to the effect that the Punjab leaders, who were in jail, should be invited to give evidence before the Committee and should be given necessary facilities for consultation with their lawyers. Because of these rebuffs, and for other reasons, the Congress decided to boycott the Hunter Committee. At the same

time, as it was necessary to ascertain precisely what had happened in the Punjab, it appointed an Enquiry Committee of its own composed of Gandhiji, Motilal Nehru, Deshbandhu Das, Abbas Tyabji, and Jayakar, with K. Santhanam as Secretary.

In the meantime another important question arose. The Sultan of Turkey was regarded as Khalif or religious head of the Muslim world. Turkey had, however, joined Germany and declared war against the Allies. In order that the Indian Muslims may not feel embarrassed to fight against their Khalif, the Prime Minister of England promised in clear terms that whatever may happen to the other enemies, the Allies would leave intact the territories under the rulership of the Sultan of Turkey, and respect his sovereignty over them. Shortly after this promise was given, it transpired that the British Prime Minister had agreed secretly with Italy, Greece and Russia to divide the Turkish territory among several countries. Owing to news censorship, India did not know of these secret arrangements till C. F. Andrews returned to India from England in April 1918. When Gandhiji was invited by the Viceroy to participate in the War Conference, he at first declined the invitation as we have already said. One of his principal reasons was this reported dismemberment of Turkey. The Viceroy argued that it was not right to believe a newspaper story without having first asked the British Government to confirm it. Gandhiji considered this argument sound, and agreed, therefore, to assist in the Government's recruiting activities.

When the War was over, however, the Turkish Empire was divided. The Muslims felt that they had been betrayed and the promise given to them in regard to the Khilafat or the rulership of the Khalif was broken. Gandhiji held that it was the duty of all non-Muslim Indians to stand by the Muslims in their grievance, and in March 1920, at a meeting of the Muslim Religious Leaders, Gandhiji declared that so long as Muslims did not get a fair deal in regard to the Khilafat, the Indian people should not in any way assist

the Government in their day to day administration. He termed this a policy of 'non-co-operation'.

On the 26th of May, 1920, the Hunter Committee Report and its recommendations were published. The Committee concluded unanimously that the riots occurred only because the people's respect for authority had been seriously undermined by Gandhiji's Satyagraha and civil disobedience movements. In all other respects the European members' views differed from those of the Indian members. The Indian members were of the opinion that the Government of the Punjab were not justified in treating the disturbances as a rebellion and there was no cause for recourse to martial law. They were also of the view that the authorities acted during the period of the Martial Law in a manner, which was most inhuman and humiliating to India. Nevertheless, the resolution which the Government of India published on the subject was quite unmistakably designed to hush up the whole episode. The resolution stated that His Majesty's Government took note of the great ability and courage with which Sir Michael O'Dwyer, the Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab (who was believed to have been the main inspirer of the inhuman atrocities in the Punjab) performed his duties at a time of serious difficulty, and recorded their appreciation. In regard to General Dyer, who was responsible for the Jallianwala Bagh slaughter, the resolution stated that the military action he took in order to disperse the crowd was excessive. He was directed, therefore, to submit his resignation. Such a face-saving resolution, however, merely increased popular discontent.

Thus, there were now two principal grievances, the Punjab repression and the Khilafat, for the redress of which it seemed justifiable to launch the non-co-operation movement. Without independence, it seemed clear, it was impossible to expect any justice. The achievement of independence became, therefore, the third objective of non-co-operation. Meetings were organized throughout the country to popularize the idea of non-co-operation. At the Khilafat Conference which was held on the 9th June 1920,

in Allahabad, a resolution in favour of non-co-operation was passed, and thereafter a letter was addressed to the Viceroy in the hope that he might seize it as an opportunity for peaceful settlement. Gandhiji also wrote a final letter in the same strain on the 22nd June. The replies to these two letters were not satisfactory and so preparations began throughout the country for the launching of the non-co-operation movement.

The Executive Committee of the Gujarat Political Conference met on the 11th of July 1920, at Nadiad and at Vallabhbhai's instance, a resolution was passed supporting non-co-operation. On the 1st of August, Gandhiji returned to the Viceroy the medals received by him from the British Government, the Boer War Medal, the Zulu War Medal and the Kaiser-e-Hind Medal, and thus started the non-co-operation movement. A special session of the Congress was planned to meet in the beginning of September at Calcutta to consider the question of non-co-operation. In order that the views of Gujarat on the subject should be crystalized before the Congress met in special session, it was decided to hold a session of the Gujarat Political Conference in Ahmedabad on the 27th, 28th and 29th of August under the presidentship of Abbas Tyabji. Vallabhbhai was elected chairman of the Reception Committee. The speech which he made on that occasion is of considerable interest. Explaining why it had been decided to call the Conference he said :

> "The All-India Congress Committee feels that before the Congress Session is held in Calcutta in the following week, an effort should be made to ascertain the wishes of the people on the proposal to offer non-co-operation. That is why this Conference is being held. The path of non-co-operation is directly opposed to the policy which has been followed hitherto, and the question which has been placed before you is the question of deflecting the course of the popular movement in that direction. Both those who support the idea of non-co-operation and those who oppose it have been asked to attend this Conference. Both schools of thought must listen to the arguments of each other with patience. People who desire independence cannot ignore popular opinion of any shade whatever, for the objective of all parties is in the final analysis the same. The difference only

arises in regard to the methods to be adopted to achieve that objective."

He then gave a brief account of what had driven them into proposing non-co-operation.

"In 1914 when the first World War began, it was said that England had been forced to enter the War for the preservation of the independence of smaller States and also in the name of truth and justice. Hundreds of thousands of soldiers went from India to fight in the battle-fields of Europe, Africa and Asia. Today there is hardly any part of the world in which people are as poor as India, and yet we make a present of 15 million rupees to England. England was not too certain of India's loyalty at first but later she was amazed at our whole-hearted loyalty and help during the War. Our wise and able leaders were of the view that to give conditional help at a time of danger would not have been honourable. But what did we get in return for this when the War was over? We were given the Rowlatt Act which deprived us of freedom of action. When the people protested against such a tyrannical piece of legislation, the Government decided upon a policy of suppressing all resistance by force. Smarting under a sense of injustice, a section of our people in a fit of temporary insanity committed atrocities. We cannot defend these mad acts of our people. When innocent people are murdered, when Government buildings are burnt, when women are attacked, it is only to be expected that the Government would react strongly and act without moderation in taking effective and deterrent action. But Government officers exceeded all bounds of reasonableness, and the Government passed a law to exonerate those officers from the normal legal consequences of their actions. And finally, it appointed a Committee ostensibly to investigate the happenings in Jallianwala Bagh and Lahore, but actually, as has turned out, to hush up everything."

After giving a summary account of the discussions in the British Parliament on the report of the Hunter Committee, Vallabhbhai went on to say:

"The British Parliament is the last court of appeal for justice. There are people in this country who have greater faith in British justice than even in the existence of God. But these discussions in the British Parliament have opened the eyes of even such people. If a person who has been cherishing a stone for a long time, believing it to be a diamond, discovers one day when he goes to sell it in his time of difficulty that it is indeed nothing but a stone, can he really blame the stone? Our condition today is what it is because of the blind faith we have had in British justice. In the House of Lords, the Lords verily showed their

nobility! They made little of the grave hardships and atrocities which the people of the Punjab endured. Murder of so many innocent men and women was to them nothing as compared with the honour of one callous Englishman: that officer they regarded as brave, and those innocent persons who were killed as rebels! General Dyer's intention was honest; he only made a slight miscalculation, he fired a few more rounds than was perhaps necessary and killed a large number of men, women and children, but, then, did he not save India? Sir Michael O'Dwyer who was mainly responsible for these atrocities was praised by the British Government for the services he had rendered to the Punjab; but the services which the people of the Punjab had rendered were forgotten."

Vallabhbhai then proceeded to give an account of the discussions in the Central Legislature:

"Presumably to instil terror into the minds of people while the Martial Law was in operation, men were killed on the slightest excuse; they were made to crawl and to trail their nose in dust; they were whipped publicly; some were executed in the market place; supply of drinking water was stopped; women were allowed to be molested and maltreated; these and many other atrocious acts were performed....

"When the order requiring people to crawl on their stomachs was criticized in the Indian Legislature by popular representatives, many members from the Government benches in replying used language, which would have done honour to a gang of gamblers and drunkards. They poured ridicule on those who had been made to crawl; even Pandit Madan Mohan Malviyaji was not spared and he was openly insulted.

"Can we easily forget this attempt to dishonour India? Not content with humiliating the Punjab, these gentlemen representing the Government considered the intolerable hardships and troubles of the people a matter for fun. The coming generation have a claim on us, who are their trustees; if we leave them only a heritage of insults and dishonour, of what use would all the wealth and all the comforts be that we may leave to them? If we put up with this insult, would it be a matter of surprise if for all time to come we are despised by civilized nations?"

He then referred to the betrayal of the Khilafat.

"The Turkish Empire was divided in spite of Britain's promise. The Sultan was made a prisoner in Constantinople. Syria was absorbed by France. Smyrna and Thrace were swallowed by Greece while Mesopotamia and Palestine were taken possession of by the British. In Arabia, too, a ruler was created who would

support the British Government. Even the Viceroy admitted that some of the conditions of peace could not but offend the Muslim community. It has, as a matter of fact, been a heart-breaking episode for the Indian Muslims, and how can Hindus stand by unaffected when they see their fellow countrymen, thus, in distress ?

"Some argue that as the representatives of Turkey had accepted the peace conditions, India had no right to protest. A signature given under duress only confirms an injustice, and can not take away the right to ask for justice. During the Martial Law in the Punjab, the officers who had caused the Punjabis to crawl had the impudence to put forward the strange defence that people crawled very willingly and that some indeed enjoyed it so much that they crawled not once or twice but even three times and, I suppose, had to be stopped from continuing to crawl along other streets! There were officers who claimed that people liked the Martial Law so much that they shouted victory to Martial Law and were anxious that the Martial Law should be kept on. Verily, there is no limit to credulity or wishful thinking. Could evidence of this nature take away from us the right to condemn or criticize the Martial Law and its injustice ?"

Gandhiji who had till then been very loyal to the British, who was, as a matter of fact, very fond of the British as a people, and had considered it an honour to co-operate with the British, felt compelled, however, after these happenings to advise the nation to offer non-co-operation. With reference to Gandhiji's co-operative attitude Vallabhbhai described a scene during the Congress of 1919 :

"I can still visualize vividly the scene on the last day of the Amritsar Congress, when Gandhiji in the *shamiana* adjoining the Jallianwala Bagh grounds, which had only a little earlier been drenched with blood, appealed to the indignant delegates and the people to pursue the path of co-operation, to seize the hand of friendship extended through the Imperial Proclamation, and to place full reliance in the promises * made in it. That same Gandhiji is today urging that India should non-co-operate."

A few days before this Conference, Sir Narayan Chandawarkar and other liberal leaders issued a statement opposing non-co-operation, and arguing that all the

* This referred to the proclamation outlining the new reforms which it was proposed to introduce. Gandhiji was still hopeful at that time, despite the problem of the Khilafat and the Punjab atrocities, that Mr Montague would not let India down.

principal religious books of the world, the Gita, the Puranas, the Bible, and the Zend Avesta, considered non-co-operation to be anti-religious. Vallabhbhai retorted :

> "I cannot claim to be as learned or to possess as deep a knowledge of religious books as these gentlemen, but I would ask them what happens to this argument when they themselves advise people not to take part in non-co-operation, to keep away from it and generally to non-co-operate with the non-co-operators ? I would like to ask Sir Narayan Chandawarkar in all humility: Why does he hang on to his British title, when he knows on the one hand that the same Government has conferred a similar title on a man like Sir Michael O'Dwyer, and on the other hand that the Gita does not forbid such renunciation as an act of protest! A great poet Sir Rabindranath Tagore has already surrendered his title of 'Sir', and the person whom you regard as a prophet, worthy of the deepest respect, has surrendered his medals."

Vallabhbhai then proceeded to deal with the criticism that the non-co-operation movement might lead to disturbances. He pointed out that while he could not deny that risks were involved, those risks must be faced, for, after all, which country in the world obtained its independence without a struggle ?

> "Is there less risk in doing nothing ? Has anyone ever for fear of possible risks given up great experiments which might, if successful, greatly benefit the people ? If the British, Empire Builders that they are, had been afraid of the risks they ran, could they have survived so long ? When we see our people suffering injustices, what help do we render if all we do is to emphasize the obstacles in the way and refrain from adopting any course of action, designed to save them from such injustices ?"

India, he felt, was being tempted with the bait of reforms, but the reforms, he was convinced, were not genuine. The organization of our Government today merely drained away the strength and vitality of the people, and kept them the more effectively under control.

> "What difference will it make, if we merely replace some foreign officers by Indians ? How are we likely to benefit by the appointment of an Indian as a Governor, instead of a Briton ? Are there not among the British Governors also, men of noble character and great ability ? Although a murderous assault was made on Lord Hardinge in Chandni Chowk, he did not want any retaliatory or repressive action to be taken. Fortunately, such great

men are not as rare as one imagines. Even so merely by throwing a few drops of Ganga water into the sewage, one can scarcely hope to purify it. There must be a radical change of outlook in the administration. The Government of India must be run for the people of India. What indeed do we stand to gain by entering the trap of the reforms, so long as the Government is run in the interests of the foreigners, and only such concessions are granted to us as are acceptable to the British ? What guarantee is there that what happened in the Punjab will not recur ?"

The chief reason for enthusiasm amongst the people for non-co-operation was that for the first time resolutions of the Congress and other political conferences, were in the form of appeals to the public for action instead of being mere petitions and representations to the Government as hitherto.

Acceptance of the non-co-operation resolution implied that people should give up their British-conferred-titles, if they held any, withdraw their children from Government schools, have no dealings with courts, resign from Legislatures, and in this way gradually deny co-operation and assistance to the Government in all its numerous activities. By another important resolution, it was decided to establish the Gujarat Vidyapith *. The reason for it was that the education system introduced by the British Government was opposed to the culture and traditions of this country and had proved itself to be unsound and unpractical. It was necessary, therefore, to establish national educational institutions, designed to impart such education to the students as would make of them men of character, patriotism and self-reliance.

In October 1920, the Gujarat Vidyapith was established and in November, the Gujarat Mahavidyalaya. Vallabhbhai adopted the Gujarat Vidyapith from the outset as his own special child and nourished it with great enthusiasm and keenness. He left the educational side of the University to experts and regarded himself as chiefly responsible for its finances.

In September a special session of the Congress was convened in Calcutta. It passed by a majority the non-co-

* Sanskrit term for University or place of advanced learning.

operation resolution, which was expanded to include the boycott of foreign cloth and the adoption of Khadi. Leaders of high standing in the Congress, like Deshbandhu Das, Bipin Chandra Pal, Jinnah, Malviyaji, Mrs. Besant, and others opposed this resolution and insisted on a vote being taken. 1852 voted in favour of Gandhiji's resolution and 908 against. The Gandhi era in the country's political world may be said to have begun with this Congress. Gandhiji's influence even at Amritsar Congress was considerable but at the Calcutta session he gave Congress policy a new orientation. He made the Congress realize that independence was not likely to be secured merely through the favour of the British Government ; on the other hand they must be expected quite naturally to place as many obstacles in our progress towards independence as possible. Our method, therefore, to achieve independence, should be to rely on our own efforts. With the adoption of this new policy, the Moderates finally decided to leave the Congress, and many even of the Extremists who did not approve of non-co-operation, severed their connection with the Congress, after making one more effort at the Nagpur Session to turn the Congress from the path of non-co-operation.

In December, elections were held for the Legislature under the new reforms under a greatly enlarged electorate. Deshbandhu Das and others who were opposed to the boycott of the Legislature, did not stand for election, however, in deference to the strong current of popular opinion against participation. Hardly any of the well-known leaders, in fact, stood as candidates. Consequently, many members of the Moderate Party and others who would not ordinarily have had any chance of securing popular support got the vote. In most places only one per cent of the voters exercised their right, in a few places 2 per cent, but hardly anywhere more than 5 per cent. There were indeed constituencies where not a single voter would give his vote. In several places the election was unopposed. The 'elected' members had, however, so little self-respect that they called themselves representatives of the people. In Surat a

Conference of the electors was held under Vallabhbhai's presidentship. It invited all those who had been elected to resign from the Legislature, and asserted that those who chose to ignore this request did not enjoy the confidence of the voters in any sense and were therefore not justified in calling themselves the people's representatives!

Then came the Congress session of Nagpur which in many ways was of special significance in the history of the Congress. Far more delegates attended it than ever before. When the non-co-operation resolution was passed in Calcutta, the strength of the opposition was fairly considerable but at Nagpur where almost 20,000 delegates were present, only two voted against it, one of the two being Jinnah who made a strong and impassioned speech against the resolution. He left the Congress when he found that only one other person supported him. It was at Nagpur that the new constitution was finalized. Gandhiji had drafted it and that, in the main, continued to be the constitution of the Congress until 1947 when independence was achieved. The former objective, Dominion Status within the Empire, was replaced at this session by that of independence through peaceful and legitimate means. The omission of any reference to the Empire in the new objective, was explained by Vallabhbhai thus :

> " Some say that we wish to leave the Empire. Whether we want to remain within the Empire or leave it, depends entirely upon the British and their intentions. We consider it desirable to remain within the Empire if we can at the same time enjoy complete independence, but if that is not possible, we shall, of course be compelled to go out of the Empire."

By another fundamental change in its constitution, every adult man or woman became eligible for membership of the Congress :

(1) on payment of an annual subscription of four annas and

(2) on subscribing to the aims and objects of the Congress.

Two other far-reaching amendments were the re-organization of the Provincial Committees of the Congress on linguistic basis and the grant of power to the President

of the Congress to set up a Working Committee of fifteen members of his own choice. Broadly the new constitution was designed to make the Congress a more efficient political organization and to bring it and keep it in close touch with the masses. After the Provincial Congress Committee of Gujarat was reorganized, Vallabhbhai became its President, and he continued to hold that position until 1942, when he was imprisoned in the Ahmednagar Fort.

Gandhiji had stated at the Calcutta Congress that if the people carried out peacefully the programme outlined in the non-co-operation resolution, independence could be achieved in a year. After the Congress of Nagpur, the slogan 'independence in a year' gathered momentum ; it certainly caught the imagination of the people and aroused great enthusiasm among them. In order to sustain their interest and enthusiasm, it was essential to place before them a definite programme of work. A meeting of the All-India Congress Committee was therefore summoned soon after the Congress session, and it was decided :

(i) to open a fund to be called the Tilak Swaraj Fund, and to collect 10 million rupees for it ;

(ii) to enrol 10 million four-anna members, and

(iii) to see that not less than 2 million spinning-wheels operated regularly in the country.

These targets were then split into sub-targets which Provincial Committees were to strive to attain respectively. Gujarat and Kathiawad were called upon to collect one million rupees, to enrol three hundred thousand members and to organize the working of a hundred thousand spinning-wheels. Strictly on the basis of population, Gujarat should have been called upon to contribute no more than 3,00,000 rupees but Gujarat wanted to become the spearhead of this particular effort and a heavier task was assigned to it. Vallabhbhai assured Gandhiji that Gujarat would respond enthusiastically. In their efforts to enrol new members and to collect money, he and his colleagues covered the entire Province by personal visits to every village, and indeed to every house in every village. Thanks to a vigorous campaign, Gujarat and Kathiawad collected not a million,

but nearly a million and a half rupees for the Tilak Fund, and completed its quota of members, and of spinning-wheels in operation.

The Government must have at first thought that the non-co-operation movement was utterly unpractical and could not possibly succeed. They, therefore, tended to ridicule it. When, however, they found a large number of students giving up their schools and colleges, they realized that this was no laughing matter but something really serious, and by the end of the year were indeed greatly puzzled. Reading between the lines of the following statement which the Government issued at that time, it is possible to appreciate the extent of their bewilderment. The principal proponents of this movement, it was stated, had announced that their object was to destroy orderly Government and to remove the British administration from the country ; they had assured their followers that if they did what they were told, India would have no difficulty in achieving independence within a year. This was, in effect, an advice to sacrifice all the political and economic progress that the country had achieved, thanks to the invaluable political stability and freedom from internal disorders, which British rule had conferred on the country, and this sacrifice was to be made at the very moment when India was about to receive further powers under the new scheme of reforms. What was particularly immoral about the movement was that it was seeking deliberately to influence the youth of the country. The leaders of the movement were apparently not horrified at the prospect of conflicts between fathers and sons, and teachers and students. The unceasing efforts of these agitators might well cause disturbances to break out ; these leaders had been moving from village to village, delivering speeches which could not but cause excitement among the people. If this danger was to be averted, persons of well-balanced and moderate views, and everyone in this country who had the interest of the people genuinely at heart should get together, oppose this agitation, and give every support to those who are doing their best to maintain law and order.

In response to an appeal of this nature, the Moderates and other supporters of the Government in Ahmedabad thought it their duty to organize public meetings, at one of which was to be delivered a lecture on the subject of "Non-co-operation — its work, its development and its disappearance". Many non-co-operators, including Vallabhbhai attended the lecture. Among those present at the meeting, there were a number of Government officers, the Collector, Police Officers, Magistrates and Mamlatdars, besides a large number of subordinate staff. The lecturer read out his address in English. When he finished speaking, Vallabhbhai got up to reply, with the permission of the Chair. As he started speaking in Gujarati, the Chairman, at the instance of the Collector, requested him to speak in English. Vallabhbhai did not consider this request reasonable, and said that if he was to speak at all, he should be allowed to do so in the language he preferred; moreover, the Collector had an excellent knowledge of Gujarati, and as regards the other gentlemen present, those of them who were officers may naturally be expected to know Gujarati. The Chairman finally left it to the good sense of the speaker, and Vallabhbhai continued in Gujarati. The Collector, however, did not like it and he and other European gentlemen who had come with him left the meeting. Vallabhbhai was able easily to give conclusive answers to all the arguments against non-co-operation. Surprisingly, however, it was the Chairman who took the co-operators seriously to task! He argued that if the non-co-operators had acquired so much influence with the people it was only because they made so many speeches, mixed freely with the people, and won them over by working amongst them. What, however, had the Moderates done to guide the people along right lines? Even in Ahmedabad where there were able Moderates, not one of them was actively opposing non-co-operation; if they thought it was wrong and not in the interests of the people, why did they not actively oppose it? Did it not indicate a lack of sense of duty on their part?

On the 30th May and the 1st of June, the fifth Gujarat Provincial Political Conference was held with Vallabhbhai

in the chair. Maulana Mohammed Ali and Maulana Shaukat Ali attended the Conference, which aroused great enthusiasm. In the course of his Presidential address, Vallabhbhai referred to the type of independence that they were seeking. He said that their independence would ensure that no one died of starvation ; that food grown by cultivators was not exported ; that people did not have to depend on cloth produced in foreign countries ; that the administration was not carried on in a foreign language, and from a remote place 7,000 ft. above sea level ; that military expenditure would not be so heavy that the country was reduced to a state of bankruptcy ; that the army would not be a mercenary one, and would not be used to keep either our own people or foreign countries in a state of subjection ; that the gulf between the salaries of the highest and the lowest paid government servants would not be so wide ; that justice would neither be costly nor difficult to obtain ; and, above all, with independence that we would not be discriminated against whether in our own country or abroad.

We are now independent and the British have left the country, but we have a long way yet to go before we achieve the independence portrayed here by Vallabhbhai.

The warning which Vallabhbhai then went on to give of the dangers of too slavish an adoption of the Western way of life is worth careful thought even today :

> "Some are propagandists of the Western way of life ; they see in the spinning-wheel a sign that the country is going back a hundred and fifty years ; but they fail to realize that Western advancement is really the cause of the unsettled state of the world today. It has led to differences between the Government and the governed, and through the help of new and more destructive weapons of war, it has destroyed big kingdoms and countries. That type of advancement is today being copied all over the world. India alone prefers to stand out against it and in the process to save not only itself but the world. Moreover, would India be able to adopt wholly these Western thoughts and developments ? India will always be behind-hand in such a race. Its spirit and culture runs totally counter to it. An India which believes in the strength of the soul cannot be attracted by a shallow demoniacal culture."

Vallabhbhai finally referred to the so-called Leagues of Peace and Order which were being organized throughout the country.

> "We hear of the establishment of Leagues of Peace everywhere. I had hoped that Gujarat would be spared this hypocrisy, but I was wrong. If these organizations are being established with the help or at the instance of officials, there is more likelihood of their causing unrest than of their bringing peace. I do not know what the object of the organizers is. Were they, until today, supporters of unrest? The organizers must know that they themselves have little influence with the people. I leave it to them to determine whether they will achieve their object through such bodies or whether they will not lose their little influence with the people by becoming tools in the hands of the Government. Do they not know that the remarkable peace which today prevails in the country is not because of the Government's military power but due entirely to the non-violent non-co-operation movement? The so-called peace associations were set up as soon as the non-co-operators started their campaign. The claim of these associations that law and order is being maintained because of their efforts is comparable to the claim of the dog walking beneath the bullock-cart that it was he and not the bullocks which pulled the cart?"

In commenting on this speech in the *Navajivan*, Gandhiji remarked that the President's speech was short, forthright, and to the point. It was as courteous as it was bold. "We are often inclined to think that courage and boldness are synonymous with impertinence and use of provocative epithets. Vallabhbhai Patel has shown that it is possible to be firm and forthright without being discourteous."

On the 30th June, the task of collecting the 10 million rupees for the Tilak Swaraj Fund was completed. A fresh task, that of the complete boycott of foreign cloth by the 30th of September was placed before the people. It was decided that on the 1st of August which was also the first anniversary of Tilak's death, bonfires of foreign cloth should be lit throughout the country, in cities as well as in villages. Among the largest of such bonfires were those organized in Ahmedabad and in Bombay. Vallabhbhai's contribution to this bonfire consisted of all his wardrobe as a barrister—gowns, suits, ties, collars, etc. Once a fire was lit anywhere, so enthusiastic was the response, that there was a ceaseless flow of foreign clothing and caps to feed the fire.

Simultaneously with the burning of foreign cloth, was started the picketing of foreign cloth shops and of liquor shops. Women took a particularly prominent part in this activity. The boycott of foreign cloth went forward with great success resulting, to begin with, in a shortage of Indian cloth. Despite a very great increase in the number of spinning-wheels in operation, the production of Khadi was still relatively small. Vallabhbhai therefore urged people not to purchase new cloth if possible and to carry on with whatever cloth they had.

About that time after a meeting in Umreth, foreign cloth was burnt at Gandhiji's instance and in that bonfire, Vallabhbhai discarded his own foreign cap. All his other clothes were made of Indian mill cloth. Soon after this incident, he had to accompany Gandhiji to a conference in Godhra, and it was on arriving in Godhra, in the summer of 1921 that he adopted Khadi and discarded for ever thereafter both foreign and Indian mill made cloth. His children, Manibehn and Dahyabhai, had taken to Khadi some time earlier. Manibehn often wondered why he delayed so long, but never asked him for an explanation as she was not accustomed to questioning her father. Khadi was at that time thick and coarse, and as it was woven in narrow width, it was necessary to stitch together two pieces to get a piece of sufficient width for use as *dhoti* or *sari*. Manibehn resolved to have *dhotis* for Sardar woven out of yarn spun by herself, but it was not till a year and a half later, i.e. in 1923, that she was able to achieve her ambition. Since then, and particularly since 1927, all Sardar's clothes were made from cloth woven out of yarn spun by Manibehn.

The picketers of liquor shops were harassed by the police and through their support by the owners of the shops. The Police Superintendent of Ahmedabad issued an order, under the District Police Act, that the number of picketers at any one place should not exceed the number fixed by the police, and that they must station themselves at least 30 feet away from the entrance to the shop. Such conditions made picketing more or less pointless. The volunteers wished to

disobey this order, but Vallabhbhai was in no hurry to force the issue. He saw that the order was entirely irregular and at his instance the Prohibition Committee passed a resolution to the effect that the order was illegal. The Police Superintendent, realizing that he was in the wrong, first amended his order and later withdrew it altogether.

In September, the Ali Brothers were convicted of the offence of spreading disaffection in the Army. The Governor of Bombay termed this activity treason, which compelled Gandhiji to retort :

> "His Excellency must know, that sedition has become the creed of the Congress. Every non-co-operator is pledged to preach disaffection towards the Government established by organized violence known as law. Non-co-operation, though a religious and strictly moral movement, deliberately aims at the overthrow of the Government, and is therefore legally seditious in terms of the Indian Penal Code."

On the 5th October 1921, a statement was issued signed by the leaders of non-co-operation, including, of course, Vallabhbhai, in which it was emphatically maintained that any Indian who served the Government which was determined to crush all attempts to attain independence, acted in a manner which was derogatory to the dignity of the Indian nation. It was the duty, therefore, of every Indian soldier and civil servant to give up Government service and to look for other means of livelihood. Thus, in effect, most of the leaders openly committed the offence for which the Ali Brothers had been sentenced !

About this time, at the pressing invitation of some friends from Kutch, Gandhiji went to Kutch accompanied by Vallabhbhai and others. The party travelled by steamer. On alighting at the port of Mandvi, while introducing the various members of the party to those who had come to receive them Vallabhbhai with all seriousness described a little girl in their party as Gandhiji's adopted Harijan daughter. Only a little while earlier it had come to be known that Gandhiji had adopted a Harijan girl named Lakshmi, and knowing that untouchability was particularly rigidly observed in Kutch, Vallabhbhai, with his usual sardonic humour, thought this a good practical joke to play

on their hosts. Everyone of the party was asked to keep up the story throughout the tour. Wherever they went, Vallabhbhai made a point of introducing the little girl and Gandhiji's new Private Secretary, Krishnadas, as Harijans. The few friends who had invited Gandhiji did not themselves believe in untouchability and so to them it made no difference, but their task as hosts became immensely difficult. In many villages people were unwilling to receive Gandhiji because of his "Harijan" companions and Gandhiji for his part naturally insisted on adhering to his programme. In several villages the people who were to act as hosts to Gandhiji and his party declined to do so, and the party had to take shelter in public rest-houses. At some places, people entertained Gandhiji and his party, but after they left, they washed their houses. Some gave them food as to untouchables, i.e. food was held some distance away or above their plates, and then 'thrown' into them, so as not to risk the pollution of contact. In one place Gandhiji's party could find no one to cook their meals for them. In some villages his meetings also were disturbed. Ignoring these inconveniences and hardships, Vallabhbhai kept up the show right through the tour and thus enabled Gandhiji to get a true picture of the strength of untouchability in Kutch.

Meantime, the non-co-operation movement continued to gather strength with every action taken to suppress or contain it. The Government appeared completely bewildered and found it difficult to decide upon the right steps to take. Whatever action they took only assisted the movement, for it invariably led to increased popular support and strength. So the Viceroy and the Government of India thought of a new plan. The Indian people had, they argued, an innate sense of loyalty to the King and his family, and if the Prince of Wales were to visit India and travelled throughout the country, the people's attention might be drawn away from the movement and it might even have the effect of reducing Gandhiji's popularity. Accordingly they invited the Prince of Wales to India. Lord Reading announced that the Prince of Wales had consented to visit

India to show his affection and friendly feelings towards his future Indian subjects. As soon as Gandhiji learnt of this projected visit, he declared that Indians did not entertain any feelings of dissatisfaction or disloyalty towards His Majesty the King or the Prince of Wales, but as the Prince of Wales proposed to visit the country as the representative of an Empire, whose domination it was the object of the non-co-operation movement to destroy, it would be advisable for him not to come at this particular time. If, nevertheless, he came, Gandhiji stated, it would become necessary for the people to boycott all processions and receptions etc. that might be organized in his honour. This warning was ignored and the Prince of Wales came to India. The 17th of November 1921 when he landed in Bombay, was observed throughout the country as a day of mourning. There was considerable excitement among the people in Bombay and incidents took place, which resulted in some cases in serious rioting. Gandhiji was himself in Bombay and announced that he would fast until peace returned. Leaders of all communities went jointly from street to street in the city to calm the people. Not until the 22nd of November was Gandhiji satisfied that peace had been completely restored, and gave up his fast.

If independence could not be obtained before the end of the year, Gandhiji had determined to start civil disobedience in some area and manner fixed by him. Because of the disturbances in Bombay, however, he had to postpone his programme until after the Congress had met in Ahmedabad in December. In the meantime he decided that disciplined units of volunteers should be organized who would be capable of controlling crowds and making them behave in an orderly manner. The Government made up its mind to take every possible repressive measure. These volunteer units were declared illegal; many all-India leaders were arrested, including Deshbandhu Das, Pandit Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru, Purushottamdas Tandon, Maulana Azad and Rajaji; 25 to 30 thousand other workers and volunteers were also arrested. In spite, however, of these arrests on a mass scale, the boycott of the Prince of

Wales remained complete and effective at every place he visited. People stood along both sides of the streets with black flags, while the doors and windows of every building and shop remained closed. This happened in Lahore, Delhi, Allahabad, Patna and other cities. Lest this might happen in Calcutta, and unpleasant scenes take place there also, the Viceroy thought of a way by which he might succeed in getting the movement called off. He persuaded Malaviyaji into believing in his proposal to call a Round Table Conference if Gandhiji would only agree to withdraw the boycott of the Prince of Wales. Malaviyaji thereupon wired to Gandhiji on the 16th of December saying he proposed to take a deputation of seven to meet the Viceroy on the 21st with a view to impressing upon him the advisability of calling a Round Table Conference ; if the Viceroy accepted his proposal, called off all repressive measures and released the leaders, would Gandhiji withdraw his opposition to the Prince of Wales' visit and suspend the Civil Disobedience Movement until the Conference was over, Malaviyaji enquired.

The Government of Bengal discussed separately with Deshbandhu Das, who was already in jail, and induced him and Maulana Azad to send a telegram to Gandhiji on the 19th of December requesting him to withdraw the boycott on condition that the Government appointed a Committee immediately to go into all questions raised by the Congress, withdrew all its punitive measures, and released unconditionally all those who had been imprisoned under the new law.

Gandhiji in his reply said that he would agree, provided two more conditions were accepted, namely, the names of the members of the Committee and the date of its appointment were agreed upon beforehand, and among the persons to be released were included those arrested for sedition. This last condition suggested by Gandhiji would have covered the Ali Brothers and those who had been imprisoned for the offence of inciting mutiny in the Army. The Government did not accept these conditions and the

Prince of Wales' reception in Calcutta was as great a fiasco as in all the other cities.

Deshbandhu Das did not like the conditions laid down by Gandhiji and after he was released, stated publicly that Gandhiji had committed a great mistake, the most arrogant of all Governments was willing to bend and yet we had let slip a golden opportunity. Whether Gandhiji was mistaken or Deshbandhu Das was unduly optimistic, must naturally be a matter of opinion. Gandhiji was not prepared to withdraw the boycott of the Prince of Wales on the verbal assurance of a conference with ill-defined functions, while Deshbandhu Das was prepared to accept the assurance implicitly. Gandhiji, again, could not dream of accepting a compromise unless among the prisoners to be released could be included those who were convicted in the Karachi case and were charged with the offence of mutiny. Deshbandhu Das, on the other hand, was ready to let these people remain in prison. Moreover, there was no guarantee amongst the conditions which Deshbandhu Das was prepared to accept that the Government would carry out the recommendations of the conference.

CHAPTER XV

NON-CO-OPERATION THROUGH THE MUNICIPALITY

After the resolution of non-co-operation was passed by the Congress at Nagpur in 1920, many Councillors of the Ahmedabad Municipality felt that they too should participate in the fight to the extent that it was possible for them to do. They decided, therefore, as mentioned earlier, not to accept Government assistance for any of the educational institutions which were being administered by the Municipality and as a corollary, to refuse to acknowledge Government's authority over their educational institutions.

The Municipality had no objection to co-operating with the Government in the matter of lighting, sanitation, water supply etc. Nothing of national significance was endangered, for example, by the Government lighting the streets. To let the Government, however, have complete freedom to develop the minds of our children, as it chose, was something intolerable. It was necessary to make education national, and therefore not to allow the Government to control education.

In order to ascertain what measure of support he would get from the Councillors of the Municipality for the new education policy which he contemplated, Vallabhbhai encouraged two Municipal school teachers to write to the Schools Committee (in October 1920) stating that they wished to comply with the directives of the non-co-operation resolution of the Congress, and that, therefore, if the Committee did not propose to withdraw their schools from Government control, they should be allowed to resign. This letter was discussed very fully in the Municipal Board and in accordance with the majority view, it was decided to postpone further consideration until members had an opportunity to ascertain the views of their constituents.

Early in February 1921, Vallabhbhai proposed that, in compliance with the directive of the Nagpur Congress, the Municipality should shake off Governmental control over primary education, and decline education grant from the

Government. This proposal was accepted by the Municipal Board. The matter was thereafter taken a step further by the Schools Committee when it resolved that in future the Deputy Education Inspector should not be invited or allowed either to inspect the Municipal Schools or to conduct the final examinations. The Deputy Education Inspector was informed of this decision and the senior staff of Municipal Schools were instructed to make suitable arrangements for holding the examinations themselves. The Education Inspector represented to the President of the Municipality that the Schools Committee's resolution was *ultra vires* and that the Schools Committee should be directed to allow the Deputy Education Inspector and his assistants to conduct the examinations and to supervise the inspection. The President brought the question immediately before a meeting of the General Board on the 28th February and proposed that as the Education Department of the Government was entitled under the law to conduct examinations of Municipal Schools and to exercise general supervision, they should not break away from the accepted procedure. The majority, however, opposed the proposal of the President, so eventually the Schools Committee's decision stood.

The battle was now joined. The Deputy Education Inspector wrote to the President on the 11th of March that he proposed to conduct the examinations on the following day as it was the legal responsibility of the Education Department to do so. The Chairman of the Schools Committee to whom this letter was passed on, replied immediately, that the examinations had already been held, and there was no necessity for the Deputy Education Inspector to hold them again. The Deputy Education Inspector then warned the President and the Schools Committee that if the examination of the 4th standard was not held in the normal way, the boys would not be regarded as fit for admission to Government or Government-supported middle schools teaching English.

While this correspondence was in progress, the Collector ruled on the 3rd March that the resolution of the

Schools Committee was *ultra vires,* and directed accordingly that it must not be implemented. This view was later upheld by the Commissioner. The President of the Municipality called a meeting of the General Board on the 17th of March to consider this ruling. One member proposed that note should be taken of the Collector's ruling and a copy should be sent for the information and guidance of the Schools Committee. Vallabhbhai moved an amendment to this resolution to the effect that the letter should be filed and the Collector informed that the examinations in the Municipal Schools had already been completed, that the new policy of the Schools Committee was formulated with very great care, that under the provisions of the District Municipal Act the Municipality was bound to comply with the wishes of the tax-paying citizens in respect of a function which the Municipality was required compulsorily to discharge, and that the Municipality was only acting in accordance with the wishes of the tax-paying citizens in implementing the new policy in regard to its schools. The amendment was passed by a majority.

The Deputy Education Inspector, however, had not exhausted all his weapons, and on the 26th April, he informed the Schools Committee that he and his assistant proposed to examine their accounts. On that very day, the Chairman of the Schools Committee replied that as the Municipality had decided not to accept any Government grant, it was no longer necessary for a representative of the Education Department to examine their accounts.

The Education Department did not, however, yet sufficiently realize that the Municipality was determined to adhere to its new policy, and presumably at the Department's instance, the Deputy Education Inspector wrote to the President of the Municipality in June, informing him that he proposed to inspect the Municipal Schools in the following month. The President passed on the letter to the Chairman of the Schools Committee who could only express his surprise at the proposal since the Education Department had been very clearly informed of

the policy of the Municipality. His Committee could not agree to the Municipal Schools being inspected in future by Government Inspectors. The teachers were at the same time instructed that they were not to allow any Government official to inspect their schools. An Assistant Deputy Education Inspector nevertheless attempted to inspect a Municipal School.

Immediately after this incident, the Municipality decided to cut away altogether from the Education Department, and informed that Department that it should recall immediately all its teachers numbering some 300. For the Education Department this created a serious problem, and it was obliged to say that it could not take back the teachers. The Municipality quite reasonably replied that they would be prepared to retain the teachers, provided, however, it was understood that the teachers would be released in future only at the convenience of the Municipality and not when it suited the Education Department to have them back. Nevertheless, a month later, the Director of Public Instruction directed that as the Schools Committee of the Ahmedabad Municipality had illegally refused to allow the Inspectors of the Education Department to conduct examinations and to inspect the schools, he could not agree to the teachers of the Education Department remaining any longer in the Municipal Schools, and ordered the teachers to appear within 10 days before the Deputy Education Inspector. The teachers were told that if they failed to comply, they would lose their pensions and promotion rights. Now the Director of Public Instruction knew quite well that he was not in a position to employ these teachers, and the threat could only be regarded as an indirect attempt to force the hands of the Municipality. Before, however, the Municipality learnt of this move, the Schools Committee had already informed all the teachers that their pay and pension would be fully safeguarded. Nevertheless, they were again told they would be given pensions in accordance with Civil Service Regulations and their salaries would correspond to those given by the Education Department; that if in spite of this assurance, any teacher wished to

revert to the Education Department, arrangements would be made immediately to release him. Only 3 out of 300 teachers expressed a wish to leave the Municipality.

The Education Department then tried a different method of attack. It was announced that new schools would be opened. Teachers from the Municipal Schools were asked to apply for service in them, and parents were advised to send their children to these new schools in preference to Municipal Schools, on the plea that as the Municipal Schools would no longer be treated as approved schools, no Government or approved schools would accept school-leaving certificates issued by them. The response both from the teachers and from the parents was, however, most unsatisfactory.

The Education Department, nevertheless, persisted in its obstructive tactics. In September, it sent away from the Teachers' Training College, teachers who had been deputed by the Municipality. This step, too, failed to have the desired effect. Indeed, from a short term point of view, it helped the Municipality by making available to them sufficient teachers to replace those who had returned to the service of the Education Department. Yet another effort was made by the Education Department to inconvenience the Municipality. The Superintendent of the Municipal Schools was an officer of the Education Department. The Government asked that he should revert immediately to Government service. At Vallabhbhai's instance, the Superintendent resigned from Government service, and stayed on with the Municipality, who confirmed him in his grade. The Commissioner of the Northern Division then refused to approve his appointment, and since that was necessary under the law, his tenure became insecure. The Superintendent, however, was willing to take that risk. Again, thus, the Municipality triumphed.

All this time, the Government tried to harass the Municipality in other directions also. Thus, when it became necessary for the Municipality to acquire land in order to widen the city streets in certain areas, the Government refused to acquire these properties, and justified its refusal

by the argument that if the Municipality wished to non-co-operate, it was scarcely proper for it to ask for Government assistance. The Municipality, however, had such amazing support from the public that it was able by negotiation with the owners to acquire all the buildings and land which it required, and had no difficulty in carrying out its improvement work according to programme.

Similarly, for the purpose of determining the rate of municipal tax, the ratable value of houses had to be determined and special officers used to be appointed by the Government to hear appeals from those who were dissatisfied with the rates fixed. But now the Government refused to make available these officers, again on the ground that if the people had the right to non-co-operate, so had the Government. The Municipality was fortunately able to carry on without Government assistance. It appointed special sub-committees from amongst its own members, and they worked virtually continuously for three months. The people received far greater satisfaction thus than they would otherwise have done.

In the end the Government of Bombay itself stepped in. Mr Pratt was appointed to be the Commissioner of the Northern Division. He had already had some experience in fighting Vallabhbhai in 1917 and in 1918 at the time of the Kheda Satyagraha. He probably took on this appointment in order to retrieve his prestige by inflicting on the Congress a crushing defeat. His first action was to get the Government to promulgate an order, which was designed to encourage all anti-Municipal interests. He also declared that Municipal Councillors would be held personally liable for any steps taken by the Municipality. He hoped thus to weaken, if possible, their adherence to the new policies. The Government resolution referred to the irresponsible nature of the action of the Municipalities of Ahmedabad, Surat and Nadiad, in refusing to accept Government control on, or money for, their primary education activities. This in effect raised the question of the extent to which Municipalities could claim to act completely independent of the Government. The constitutional position undoubtedly was that

Municipalities derived their authority from the District Municipal Act, and that authority could be increased only by the legislature which passed that Act. The rules framed under the Municipal Act were just as binding as sections of the Act. And these rules fixed the limits of the independence conferred on Municipalities. Any infringement of those rules was unauthorized and constituted a failure of duty on the part of a Municipality.

In order to encourage the spread of primary education, the Government had undertaken to assist Municipalities to the extent of 50 per cent of their total expenditure on primary education. By refusing to accept Government grant, a Municipality was, therefore in effect, reducing the benefits to which the people were entitled, unless, of course, the Municipality chose to double the burden of its taxes. It was also necessary for Municipal Councillors to bear in mind that any sum which was regarded as having been misappropriated under Section 42 of the District Municipal Act was recoverable from every Councillor who had authorized such expenditure.

In order to give all the parties concerned sufficient time to consider the matter, the Government decided to defer taking steps against any Municipality and to obtain full report on the working of the three Municipalities by the end of October. In the meantime, the Government made it clear that it was open to any citizen to bring a civil suit against a Municipality for the misuse of its funds etc. As a result of this, what might appropriately be described as, open invitation, a nominated Municipal Councillor of Ahmedabad filed a civil suit, which, however, was lost. The Government hoped that non-co-operating Councillors would be frightened at the prospect of personal responsibility, and that as a result, their number in the Municipality would diminish. Instead, at Vallabhbhai's instance, the Municipal General Board recorded that the Government resolution of the 23rd of September was calculated, on the one hand, to incite tax-paying citizens against the Municipality and, on the other, to make it difficult for the Municipality to do its duty by the tax-payers. It was the contention of the Board

that it understood better the educational needs of the tax-payers than the Government, and that in any case, whatever the Municipality had done was in accord with what they believed to be the wishes of the citizens.

At this stage, the Minister for Education, Sir Raghunath Paranjpe, decided to visit Ahmedabad and make a personal attempt at finding a way out of the deadlock. Almost at the outset of their talk Vallabhbhai asked the Minister what would happen if they came to a compromise and if the compromise was not acceptable to the Governor. Sir Raghunath Paranjpe was not prepared for such a question. Vallabhbhai, on the other hand, was quite clear in his mind that even if the Municipality's activities were well within the law, they must be a part of the general non-co-operation movement. The I. C. S. officers looked upon it in that light and it was scarcely reasonable to expect the Governor to ignore their views, whatever the popular Ministers of his Government may say. Sir Raghunath did not appreciate such plain speaking by the leader of one of the parties of the Municipality. After Vallabhbhai left, the Minister is reported to have said: "Look at the impertinence of that man that he talks to me in this manner."

The Government decided to take one final drastic step. The Municipality of Ahmedabad was charged with having acted irregularly in preventing Government Inspectors from inspecting and conducting examinations in Municipal Schools. The Commissioner, Northern Division, was ordered to fix a definite date by which it should carry out its duties as laid down in the various rules formulated by the Government for the running of Primary Schools. Accordingly, Commissioner Pratt asked the President of the Municipality to comply with the normal rules by the 17th of December and suggested further that he should arrange to call a general meeting, immediately to consider this directive. On December the 12th a special meeting of the Municipal Board was called, at which it was proposed that the Government should be asked to revise its rules so as to make it possible for Municipalities which desired to run their Primary Schools themselves out of their own

resources, to do so. With a view to allow an opportunity to the Government to arrive at a compromise Vallabhbhai and other staunch non-co-operators on the one hand, and the co-operating Municipal Councillors for their own reasons on the other, neither opposed nor supported the proposal, with the result that it was accepted by the Board.

Instead of expressing any view on this proposal, the Commissioner of the Northern Division directed the President of the Municipality on the 17th of December as from the evening of that day, to withdraw all the powers of the Schools Committee over the administration of Municipal Schools, and to hand over charge of the Primary Schools to the Deputy Education Inspector of the Northern Division. The Municipal President was also ordered to place within seven days a sum of Rs. 72,000 at the disposal of the Deputy Education Inspector for meeting the expenses of the Primary Schools. The President of the Municipality decided that the Commissioner's order should be placed before a special meeting of the General Board on the 23rd of December. Simultaneously, in order to prevent the Deputy Education Inspector from taking charge of the schools on the 18th, the Schools Committee closed the schools for a month's holiday.

On the 18th it issued a leaflet over the signature of seventeen Municipal Councillors in order to place the whole position fairly before the public of Ahmedabad. The signatories contended that as the representatives of the public, they had done their best to see that children received education along national lines in the Municipal Schools, and they were satisfied that the new system had instilled a new spirit in the children. The Government, however, did not approve of this, and had decided upon repressive measures. Even when the Municipalities of Surat and Nadiad entrusted their schools to a separate educational body, the Government took over the schools forcibly. In order that no untoward incident might take place while the Congress was in session, the Municipality had decided to close its schools for a month, but it was probable that under the orders of the Commissioner, the Education Department

would try to take over the schools and run them immediately. The parents should, however, refuse to send their children to schools during this month. Once the Congress session was concluded, appropriate steps would be taken to cope with whatever situation was created.

On the 19th December the Schools Committee met and refused to accept the charge that they had failed to discharge any of their duties under the District Municipal Act. The Commissioner's order was, therefore, illegal. Moreover, the Committee recorded it as their considered opinion that it was improper for the President to have handed over the administration of the Municipal Schools to the Deputy Education Inspector without consulting either the Schools Committee or its Chairman. It, therefore, requested the General Board not to transfer to the Deputy Education Inspector the sum of Rs. 72,000 as directed in the Commissioner's order.

The Deputy Education Inspector, meantime, tried to get the schools re-opened, but as the boys did not attend, he had to give up his efforts. The Commissioner, for his part, arranged to have the sum of Rs. 72,000 transferred directly from the Municipal account with the Imperial Bank to the account of the Deputy Education Inspector without consulting the Municipality or waiting for its concurrence. On the 5th January, the Deputy Education Inspector drew Rs. 10,000 from this account in order to pay the salaries of the Municipal teachers, but the Municipal teachers refused to take their salaries from him.

On the 6th once again the General Board met. It maintained that the Commissioner's action in withdrawing money from the account of the Municipality on his own authority was illegal, and advised that the Imperial Bank should be called upon to retransfer the amount immediately to the Municipal account. The Municipality accepted these proposals by a large majority. The Commissioner knew, of course, that the non-co-operator members with a leader such as Vallabhbhai would not comply with his orders, but he did not realize that his arbitrary and illegal conduct would enrage even moderate members to such an extent as to

make them almost take the lead in this particular matter. The Commissioner sent a reply to the Municipality the same day, saying that he did not accept the Municipality's views and telling the President not to carry out the resolution passed by his Board. To circumvent the Commissioner's order, Vallabhbhai convened a meeting of the Schools Committee early on the 7th morning. The Committee decided that the teachers should be paid from the Municipal Treasury. He therefore asked the Personal Assistant of the Chief Officer to obtain money as soon as the Bank opened and to see that the teachers received their salaries that very day by noon.

There thus took place a series of manoeuvres and counter manoeuvres, until there remained no doubt in the mind of the Commissioner that the Municipality would not give in under any circumstance, nor was it possible to outwit it. He, therefore, finally moved the Government to suspend the Municipality on the 9th February 1922.

In an interview, after this dispute terminated, Vallabhbhai stated that at first the non-co-operators had only a slender majority in the Municipality, but owing to the Commissioner's arbitrary and illegal actions the non-co-operators won the support of many staunch co-operators. Indeed many members who normally co-operated with the Government actively joined hands with the non-co-operators in this dispute. Not only was there no feeling of bitterness between the co-operators and the non-co-operators in the Municipality but their relationship continued to be as friendly as before the non-co-operation movement.

After the suspension of the Municipality, Vallabhbhai wrote an article in the *Navajivan* on the 18th February showing that the orders of the Government were illegal and that the order for suspension was opposed to the policy of the Government of India. He recalled that when the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms were introduced, the Government of India declared that every opportunity should be given to the local bodies to make mistakes and to rectify them through experience, and that Government servants should

not in any way interfere in their administration. By suspending a body such as the Ahmedabad Municipality, whose administration had been considered efficient by those competent to judge, he argued that the Bombay Government had acted contrary to the policy of the Government of India, that on the merits of the case, therefore, it was totally unjustifiable for the Government of Bombay to have suspended the Municipality.

Thus, ended this spirited fight in which Government officials did not show up to advantage, and the heartening feature was the growing determination of the people to stand up for their rights.

CHAPTER XVI

AFTER THE MUNICIPALITY WAS SUSPENDED

As soon as the order suspending the Municipality was published in the Government Gazette on 9-2-'22, the citizens of Ahmedabad met and decided to set up a popular body to control primary education, and called upon the people to stop sending their children to schools under Government management. The meeting also recorded its appreciation of the services rendered to the people by the popularly elected Councillors of the Municipality.

The Surat Municipality was also dissolved and for the same reasons. The Government was apparently determined to have its way. However, as Gandhiji said in an article in the *Navajivan* on 19th February 1922, the new committees set up to replace the Municipalities could function effectively only if there was public co-operation. He asked every citizen accordingly not to send his children to Government-controlled schools, and to refuse to pay his taxes. If they did this, the Government would be compelled to give way. In another article in the *Navajivan* of the following week, Gandhiji exhorted the people of Surat and Ahmedabad to stand fast, for this was a test of their courage and determination. No better proof was necessary of the hollowness of the Reforms than the act of suspension of the two Municipalities. Had the Municipalities acted arbitrarily, there might have been some justification for such high-

handedness. But this act of the Government was wanton. The main point at issue in the conflict concerned education, and it was too vital a matter for the citizens to yield on. It was indeed the first duty of citizens to have complete control over education, and to see that it was so sound and well-planned that people would be tempted on merits to put their children in schools run by the citizens.

Gandhiji was arrested soon after and on the 18th of March he was sentenced to six years' imprisonment. This, however, did not damp the spirits of the citizens who continued to meet the challenge bravely. Few children attended the Government Schools, while the rush of pupils in the popular schools was ever-increasing. Vallabhbhai gave a detailed account of the situation in an article in the *Navajivan* of 25-6-'22. The Government, he said, expected that within four months after the dissolution of the Ahmedabad Municipality it could regain its hold on education; it thought that the people's resistance would end with the dissolution of the Municipality; that, in any case, there would not be funds enough to enable the people to run their new schools independently; that teachers would not wish to leave their permanent jobs; and above all that parents would be reluctant to send their children to such new and untried schools. All these assumptions, however, proved false. Already 43 schools were being run by the People's Education Board, including 13 girls' schools and 8 Urdu schools. Several magnificent buildings had been acquired to house these schools. Of the 270 teachers, 65 per cent were trained for the profession, and at least that percentage had been previously in the Municipal Schools. The total number of pupils rose rapidly to 8,400, of whom 904 were Muslims. There were 2,107 girls in the Girls' Schools, and more pupils were enrolling themselves. The monthly expenditure was estimated at about Rs. 10,000, and to meet it the People's Education Society had been able to raise Rs 1,25,000 by way of public subscriptions. As against this the Committee appointed by the Government was running 57 schools with a staff of 250 teachers. The total number of pupils on their rolls was less than 2,000.

Vallabhbhai followed this account two months later in the *Navajivan* with an article entitled "Deplorable Condition of Local-Self Government", in the course of which he emphasized that three out of four Municipalities were financially crippled. Their income failed to keep pace with the expenditure, and there was no room for further taxation. The very capable Minister in charge of the Education Department had increased the scales of pay for teachers but had not taken the trouble to ascertain if the Municipalities could afford these scales! The Municipalities found it impossible to pay according to the new scales and the Government was unable to help them. And yet when two of the larger Municipalities in the Presidency decided to take over charge of education in their respective areas, the Government was offended and suspended them. The same Government, however, was willing to condone the vast majority of the Municipalities which had failed to revise the pay scales of the teachers employed by them.

Eventually, in February 1924, the Municipality was reinstated in Ahmedabad. It allowed the People's Education Society to run its schools and gave the Society a grant of Rs. 1,50,000. Legally, the Municipality was within its rights in granting aid to schools not recognized by the Government. The then Director of Education, however, was not happy at the fact that so many boys and girls should be studying in schools which were not recognized by the Government. It was a position which did no credit to the Education Department. On the Congress side too, there were people who favoured relaxation of boycotts other than the boycott of foreign cloth. Vallabhbhai also was not desirous of continuing the feud, if he could be assured that Government control over schools would be nominal. Therefore, after some informal talks, it was decided to close the schools run by the People's Primary Education Board. All the teachers who were formerly employed by the Municipality and had subsequently joined the service of the Society were absorbed by the Municipality. Their absence from Municipal Service was treated as leave without pay and they were given advance increments for about 2½ years to

regularize their position in regard to promotions. Mr Pratt, the Commissioner refused, however, to sanction the grade of Rs. 200 to 400 in the case of Mr Pranlal Desai. Vallabhbhai was of the view that the grade should be applied retrospectively from March 1921 when Mr Desai began to draw Rs. 200 per month in Government service. The Director of Public Instruction agreed with this and undertook to see the proposal through, if Vallabhbhai would write once again to the Commissioner on the subject. The Commissioner eventually accepted the proposal. The schools' controversy thus ended.

The Government, however, put all manner of difficulties and obstacles in the way of the Municipality. To begin with, the Government filed a suit in the District Court to recover Rs. 1,68,600 towards expenses incurred by the Municipality on its schools during the relevant period, from the nineteen Councillors who had sponsored resolutions seeking to prevent the Education Department from conducting examinations in Municipal Schools or carrying out periodical inspections. It was contended that the Municipality had committed a breach of Rules 2 and 3 under Section 58 of the Act and Rule 7 of the Vernacular Masters' Code, and had failed to run the schools according to the law. Expenses incurred in running the schools in contravention of the law, thus, constituted misapplication of Municipal funds for which the 19 Councillors should be held responsible jointly and severally. There was no difference of opinion as far as the facts of the case were concerned, and the judge had only to decide whether the expenditure incurred in connection with the running of the schools independently of Government control could reasonably be construed as misapplication of Municipal funds and if so, whether the defendants could be held responsible. The Secretary of the Schools Committee was summoned to give evidence before the court and deposed that during the period mentioned in the suit, no changes were made in the management of the schools; the curriculum and the text-books were the same as before; the teachers were paid according to their fixed scales of

pay; the schools were open to visitors and their observations were copied from the visitors' book for transmission to the Schools Committee Office where these were duly filed. After a careful appraisal of all relevant facts, the judge came to the conclusion that there had been no breach of Rule 2 or of the Vernacular Masters' Code. Under Rule 3, however, the Inspectors of the Education Department had a right to inspect the schools and to conduct examinations, and the Municipality's refusal to comply with this regulation, was unquestionably illegal. But this one illegality did not render their action in running the schools under their own authority unauthorized. The Act itself had placed the responsibility for running the schools on the Municipality, and the Municipality had kept its accounts properly and spent money under proper sanctions. One illegal act in managing the schools could not render the entire expenditure incurred on them unauthorized or improper.

The Government was not satisfied with the orders of the court and it went in appeal to the High Court, who, too, dismissed the appeal with costs. Vallabhbhai's opinion that no two views on this point could reasonably be taken was thus fully borne out.

Two other Municipalities in Gujarat, viz. those of Nadiad and Surat, also attempted to carry out the policy of the Congress in the same manner as Ahmedabad. This was natural since movements in all the three places were being guided by Vallabhbhai. They decided to take the Municipal Schools out of the control of the Education Department of the Government and from that decision followed consequences which were not greatly dissimilar to those in Ahmedabad, except that the Government adopted somewhat harsher measures towards them, particularly for the recovery of taxes which the citizens had decided they would not pay. The Surat Municipality was suspended exactly as the Ahmedabad Municipality was, while in Nadiad the non-co-operation members resigned *en bloc* from the Municipality, and so great was the popular support which they enjoyed that for nine of the constituencies no candidate came forward to stand at the by-election. All the three

Municipalities were indeed fighting for the establishment of a genuine local self-government. They deliberately restricted their effort to the limited field of education, and citizens, teachers and other workers in the three places, all of whom had to make some sacrifices, received extremely valuable training for the struggle for independence. Indeed it may be said that this fight engendered in citizens genuine interest in the work of the Municipality and confidence in their own ability to run the administration.

CHAPTER XVII

THE AHMEDABAD CONGRESS — 1921

After nineteen years the Congress was holding its annual session in Ahmedabad in December 1921, and it was imagined that independence was going to be won that year. There was, therefore, great jubilation and enthusiasm in the city. Besides, this was the first session of the Congress after its new Constitution had been approved. The number of the delegates was limited to some six thousand. In addition, a fair number of guests from other political parties as well as non-delegate Congressmen were expected to attend.

Vallabhbhai was elected Chairman of the Reception Committee and Mavlankar its Secretary. Under the inspiring general guidance of Gandhiji, Vallabhbhai and Mavlankar organized everything relating to the session, in a remarkably thorough and efficient manner. They set themselves new targets of cleanliness, sanitation and comfort in regard to accommodation for visitors. There was to be none of the usual outer glamour and show, covering a whole host of distasteful shortcomings. Excellent but simple sanitary arrangements were made ; specially constructed waterworks provided adequate supply of water for all purposes ; a sound system of drainage ensured throughout the session the disposal of used water in so efficient a manner that there was never any unsightly or foul smelling accumulation of water anywhere. Arrangements for living and eating were

well planned: everything was in the Indian fashion; those desirous of and accustomed to Western food and Western ways of living were accommodated in the few hotels of the city. And to crown everything, the cost was kept down to a remarkably low figure.

The main pandal where the Congress was to meet was very tastefully designed. For the first time, no chairs were provided for any one. The ground was levelled and covered with a top layer of river sand. A slightly raised platform was arranged for the President, members of the Reception Committee and other leaders. The decorations were inexpensive and consisted in the main of artistically arranged flowers and leaves. An ingenious scheme solved the problem of shoes, which people had necessarily to remove in order to squat on the floor: small Khadi bags were provided at a small price to every delegate and visitor, and in them they carried their shoes into the pandal: thousands of yards of Khadi were thus sold, and people had no anxiety regarding their footwear being stolen, and there was no unseemly scramble for shoes at the end of each meeting.

As usual, in the vicinity of the Congress pandal, space was provided for open air meetings, where well-known leaders spoke on the current business of the Congress as well as other subjects. A small Swadeshi Exhibition was also organized. Handspun yarn, and cloth handwoven out of handspun yarn was exhibited in all its stages of production, and attracted much attention. A Music Conference was also held at the time.

The excitement at this Congress session reached such a pitch that at times people lost their sense of proportion. All manner of rumours were set afloat. It was said that on the opening day, Gandhiji, Vallabhbhai and others would unfurl the national flag and that when that happened, the Government would start shooting those who had assembled for the session. This task was said to have been assigned to Col. Rana Pratap Singh of Idar State, who was expected to arrive in Ahmedabad with his force for the purpose. Gandhiji and Vallabhbhai felt constrained to refer to these

rumours in the *Navajivan.* "Mischievous and timid people appear to have started these rumours", said Gandhiji. He had had talks with the Superintendent of Police and he was assured that it was not the intention of the authorities to post any special armed police near the Congress area. And indeed, everywhere in the Congress Nagar, it was the Congress Volunteer Corps which regulated traffic and generally maintained order in a praiseworthy manner.

While preparations for the Congress session were in progress, the Prince of Wales' tour was proceeding according to programme in Northern India. To forestall demonstrations the Government had started the practice of arresting beforehand volunteers and leaders in the various places he was due to visit, and accordingly before the Prince of Wales was to go to Bengal, Deshbandhu Das, the President-elect of the Ahmedabad session, was arrested in Calcutta. Writing about it in the *Young India* of 15-12-'21, Gandhiji observed :

> "The arrest of our President-elect need not perturb us. His spirit will preside over our deliberations. We know what message he has for the country. He has become the living embodiment of it. Certainly no Congress has ever met under happier auspices than this will. What seemed impossible has been rendered almost possible by the welcome repression of the Government. That many of the best of us are in gaol is Swaraj. I would call it the fullest Swaraj if the Government simply invited every non-co-operator to offer himself on or before the 26th instant at the nearest police station for arrest and imprisonment, and to be under custody till he has apologized for his non-co-operation or till the Government feels the necessity for repentance. For me any such order of the Government will be complete Swaraj."

But the Ahmedabad Congress was not to have this good fortune and the session was held on the appointed day. Deshbandhu Das had sent his written address to the session. Hakim Ajmal Khan of Delhi was elected President to conduct the business of the session. Vallabhbhai, as the Chairman of the Reception Committee, made a brief speech. Explaining the special preparations made for the session he said that it had been hoped that at this session the attainment of Swarajya (freedom) would be celebrated and therefore special effort worthy of such an occasion was

made. Instead, it had pleased the Almighty to make us endure yet more hardships and troubles, — no doubt to test our mettle all the more, and to make us appreciate and be better fitted for the precious gift of independence. Imprisonments, physical assaults, seizures, searches, and forcible entry into our schools and offices should be regarded as unmistakable signs of the approaching Swaraj and it was, therefore, decided not to alter in any way such simple preparations as had been made for the reception of the delegates and the visitors. He said that the Khaddar used in the Khadinagar and the Congress pandal was mainly produced in Gujarat. Almost two hundred thousand pounds of Khaddar had so far been spun and woven, and the use of Khaddar in this manner in the construction of the Congress colony was a practical proof of what had been done to promote the Swadeshi movement in Gujarat.

Gujarat had indeed not been through the fire of repression as had the people of Bengal, the Punjab, U. P. and other provinces. But, said Vallabhbhai, non-violence had been inculcated in the people of Gujarat, a non-violence not of weakness or cowardice but of voluntary self-restraint. Vallabhbhai then proceeded to give an idea of Gujarat's preparations for the struggle. The Government had forcibly taken possession of the national schools run by the Surat and Nadiad Municipalities, and they were likely also to seize the Ahmedabad schools. These actions of the Government, he said, only provided an opportunity to the people to demonstrate their strength, and the issue was unlikely finally to be settled except through Civil Disobedience. The Talukas of Bardoli and Anand were making intensive preparations for Civil Disobedience, and with God's good grace, he was confident that Gujarat would have the strength to face the ordeal successfully.

The main problem before this session related to the Civil Disobedience Movement. A lengthy and detailed resolution was moved by Gandhiji and supported by Shri Vithalbhai Patel, emphasizing the fact that whenever all other ways of restraining arbitrary and tyrannical use of authority had been exhausted, Civil Disobedience was the

only civilized and effective alternative to an armed rebellion. If the Government was to be made answerable to the people of India, instead of being as at present completely irresponsible, recourse must be had to individual Civil Disobedience, and wherever people were adequately trained in the methods of non-violence, to mass Civil Disobedience. Any such movement must necessarily be conducted with great care and strictly under the guidance of a definite authority. The resolution proposed Gandhiji as the sole executive authority of the Congress for this purpose. In a short but stirring speech, Gandhiji, who was deeply moved, laid stress on the fact that there was no question of any rash challenge to battle. Undoubtedly, however, they were challenging in all humility but with all the firmness at their command, that authority which sought to safeguard itself by denying to the people the twin rights of freedom of speech and freedom of association. If this attitude was persisted in, the authority would find itself utterly destroyed, or in the process, every man and woman of this country would allow themselves to be destroyed.

The resolution, it was claimed, embodied firmness, humility and determination. If there was any possibility of a compromise, that would have been attempted. Who more than he (Gandhiji) loved the path of peace and compromise ? But he was not prepared to accept a settlement at the cost of self-respect. It was not the peace of the graveyard that he wanted.

The Congress session was held in a tense atmosphere, and dispersed in, if anything, an even tenser atmosphere. But everything went off smoothly and was managed competently, and as Gandhiji summed up in the *Navajivan*, Gujarat had done well. Tents and pandals of Khaddar worth 3,50,000 of rupees were pitched, an interesting exhibition was organized, and the greatness of Indian music was displayed. Hindus and Muslims stayed amicably together side by side. Gujarati girls served competently as volunteers, and Gujarati youths willingly worked even as sweepers to ensure the comfort of the visitors. Strict discipline was maintained, and no long speeches were made. To

crown everything a resolution was passed which challenged the Government and its repressive policy, and Bardoli Taluka was selected for inaugurating the mass Civil Disobedience.

Vallabhbhai was anxious to acquire the plot of land where the pandal was constructed to establish there a Gujarat Sevak Samaj on the lines of Gokhale's Bharat Sevak Samaj. But the price demanded was too high and the negotiations broke down. Later prices came down and the Municipality was able to purchase the plot for less than a third of the price originally demanded. On that plot there stands today the Vadilal Sarabhai Hospital. The fountain in the forecourt of the Hospital is a pleasant reminder of the Congress session even today. When the accounts of this session were closed, there was sufficient money left to enable the local Congress organization to build the present Congress House in the city. So efficiently did Vallabhbhai conduct the arrangements.

CHAPTER XVIII

CHAURI CHAURA INCIDENT AND GANDHIJI'S ARREST

In the history of the Indian struggle for independence, the year 1921 will be inscribed in letters of gold. Gandhiji's promise to the people that if they fulfilled the conditions laid down by him, they would get independence in a year had aroused among the people intense enthusiasm and instilled unshakable hope. The programme of Khadi, removal of untouchability, Hindu-Muslim unity and the boycott of Law Courts, Schools and Legislatures received vigorous popular support. After the task of collecting 10 million rupees for the Tilak Swaraj Fund and of enrolling 10 million members in the Congress was completed, as planned, before the 30th of June, the session of the All-India Congress Committee was convened in July in Bombay. Many members under the influence of the prevailing enthusiasm pressed Gandhiji very strongly to start Civil

Disobedience. The Government in the meantime added fuel to the fire by arresting workers and volunteers in various places. Nevertheless, Gandhiji advised people to be patient yet a while longer and desired that the boycott of foreign cloth should be completed by the 30th of September. Eventually in November 1921 when only a month was left to fulfil the promise of independence within the year, the All-India Congress Committee authorized every Provincial Congress Committee to institute Civil Disobedience to the point of refusing to pay taxes, on its own responsibility. Certain conditions were laid down. Thus, when individual Satyagraha was to be offered, the Satyagrahi should know how to spin, and should have given up foreign cloth, should have, in practice, himself accepted the abolition of untouchability etc.; where the movement was to be launched as a mass movement, the effort should be confined to a District or a Taluka, where the great majority of the population had accepted in practice the gospel of the spinning wheel, handwoven cloth etc. Gandhiji advised the Provincial Congress Committees through the members of the All-India Congress Committee not to launch the movement in their Provinces until he had had a chance of trying it out in the Taluka selected by him for it in Gujarat. They should above all do all they could to see that law and order in their respective areas were maintained, while that experiment was first carried out. He emphasized this again in an article in the *Young India* of 10th November 1921:

> "Though, therefore, the All-India Congress Committee has authorized Civil Disobedience by Provincial Congress Committees on their own responsibility, I hope they will put due emphasis on the word 'responsibility' and not start Civil Disobedience with a light heart. Every condition must be given its full effect. The mention of Hindu-Muslim unity, non-violence, Swadeshi and removal of untouchability means that they have not yet become an integral part of our national life. If an individual or a mass have still misgivings about Hindu-Muslim unity, if they have still any doubt about the necessity of non-violence for the attainment of our triple goal, if they have not yet enforced Swadeshi in its completeness, if the Hindus among that mass have still the poison of untouchability in them, that mass or that individual are not ready for Civil Disobedience. Indeed it would be best to watch and

wait whilst the experiment is being carried on in one area. Reverting to the analogy of the army, those divisions that watch and wait are just as much co-operating actively as the division that is actually fighting. The only time, whilst the experiment is going on, that individual civil disobedience may be resorted to simultaneously, is when the Government obstruct even the silent prosecution of Swadeshi. Thus if an order of prohibition is served upon an expert spinner going to teach or organize spinning, that order should be summarily disregarded and the teacher should court imprisonment. But in all other respects, in so far as I can judge at present, it will be best for every other part of India scrupulously to respect all orders and instructions whilst one part is deliberately taking the offensive and committing a deliberate breach of all the unmoral State laws it possibly can."

Two Talukas of Gujarat were friendly contenders for the honour of initiating the campaign, Anand and Bardoli. Both had been preparing themselves for some time. Their representatives put forward their respective cases before the Provincial Committee, each maintaining a strictly correct attitude towards the other, and displaying neither bitterness nor unreasonableness. The aged Abbas Tyabji in putting forward the case for Anand said to Gandhiji very humbly :

"Whatever your conditions may be, everyone of us is prepared to fulfil them ; only tell us once for all what they are. You asked us to collect our share of the ten million rupees. Did we not go from village to village and collect the money ? You asked us to increase the production of Khadi ; you have only to look at me to be assured of that. In my old age, I have literally worn myself out, visiting people in their homes to preach to them the gospel of the spinning wheel and Khadi. You can come and see our villages for yourself. If there still remains something more to be done, please tell us. But you must not find some new argument and destroy our hopes and our enthusiasm....The flag of Satyagraha was unfurled in the Kheda district and in the course of that struggle the people of Anand Taluka received their training. Therefore the Taluka has a special right and claim to be selected for undertaking mass Civil Disobedience in preference to any other area."

The case for Bardoli was presented by Kalyanjibhai Mehta in equally effective, though in a different, manner. He claimed that when the British first came to India, they landed at the Surat Port and established their first factory

in Surat. It was from Surat that they extended their dominion over the rest of the country. Therefore, it was only appropriate that Surat should set afoot the movement to say farewell to them.

A full consideration of their respective claims and state of preparedness led to the conclusion that both Talukas were ready and fit for offering Civil Disobedience. It was, therefore, decided that Gandhiji and Vallabhbhai should tour the two Talukas and then decide jointly which of them should be selected for offering the first battle.

In the meantime, on the 17th November, the Prince of Wales was expected to land in Bombay. As the Congress had decided to boycott his visit in the fullest manner possible, the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee was anxious that Gandhiji should be in Bombay on that day. Acçeding to their request, he arrived in Bombay on the 17th. He had planned to leave the same evening for Bardoli so as to reach there on the 18th. On the 17th, however, there were grave disturbances in Bombay and until they could be stopped and peace fully restored among all the communities of Bombay, Gandhiji went on a fast. After his fast was over, he decided to postpone the launching of mass Civil Disobedience until a later date to be fixed by the Congress which was due to meet in Ahmedabad in December.

Gandhiji wrote to the Anand and Bardoli workers, who were, as it were 'straining at the leash', to have patience :

"I know that you will be most unhappy. You had high hopes. In this very year through your sacrifices you had hoped to be able to free the Ali Brothers and other prisoners, to console the Punjab, which has passed through such troublous times, and above all, to achieve independence. God, however, seems to have willed otherwise.

"I am particularly concerned at the grief of my great friend and colleague Abbas Saheb Tyabji over this decision. I have seen him weeping at the horrors which the Punjab had to suffer. He has today in his old age undertaken so much work as would put many a young man to shame. Though he has spent all his life in comfort and plenty he has forsaken everything and takes

delight now in his discomfort. He will be deeply distressed at the thought that he will not be able to send the Kheda District and in particular the Anand Taluka to jail. Let me assure him that his patience will be rewarded.

"We have lost nothing. We have learnt to gain happiness through sorrow, and peace through conflict. God has saved us from a bigger sorrow by making us face the smaller. I ask of you the purest of sacrifices. In the court of God, a pure sacrifice is always welcome. In the unexpected extra time that you have now obtained, take steps to remove all your shortcomings."

Gandhiji then went on to emphasize that independence could be achieved only through one's own efforts :

"Those who believe, or have persuaded themselves and others to believe, that Gandhi somehow or other will secure independence for them are unconsciously their own and their country's enemies. They have not understood the meaning of the word 'independence'. Independence means self-reliance. I can only advise you on the right way to set about achieving independence. But it is by your own efforts that you will reach the goal. I am like the doctor, who might give you the right medicine and might even tell you how to eat it, in what quantity etc., but in the final resort it is for the patient to take the medicine and have the will to survive.

"I wish to remove all your illusions regarding me. I would like people to know that I am an insignificant creature. It is far better that people should believe, and indeed it is nearer the truth, that whatever has been achieved has been achieved through their own sacrifices and through their selflessness rather than through my strength."

At the Ahmedabad Congress it was decided, as we have seen, that Civil Disobedience was to be offered and that Gandhiji was to be the sole dictator for the purpose. He decided to start mass Civil Disobedience under his own supervision in Gujarat. Again there arose the question, whether Anand or Bardoli should be selected. Both the Talukas had made very enthusiastic preparations, but Vallabhbhai's choice fell on Bardoli. His view was that while the people of Kheda District were clever and keen, they were somewhat excitable and might under provocation lose control over themselves and resort to violence. On the other hand, the people of Bardoli were more placid and peaceful by temperament. Gandhiji, who had gained some experience of Kheda District in 1918, readily accepted

Vallabhbhai's advice, and Bardoli was selected finally for staging the fight for independence.

Government institutions were already almost completely boycotted in Bardoli, and national schools had been established in 51 of the 80 small and large villages. Almost everyone had purchased a spinning wheel and had begun spinning. Thus Bardoli had made a really fine beginning, and as soon as this decision was taken, preparations were made to refuse to pay land revenue dues. The Assistant Collector (Shri Shivdasani who a little later, after Gandhiji's arrest, resigned from the Indian Civil Service) was greatly concerned at this and from his camp at Bardoli issued a statement in which he sought to make the people realize the consequences of what they were doing. Failure to pay land assessment when it fell due made the land in question liable to be confiscated under the Land Revenue Code. The Government would not lose any money. In the Bardoli Taluka alone, the standing cotton crop was worth at least a million rupees and if the Government were to sell the standing crop, they would probably have no difficulty in obtaining at least seven to eight hundred thousand rupees. The land revenue assessment of the whole Taluka amounted to no more than three hundred to three hundred and fifty thousand rupees. It would not be necessary for the Government to touch the cattle or other private property. People should note these facts before they made up their minds to take the serious step of refusing to pay their land revenue assessment. The Assistant Collector made it clear that he was neither issuing a threat nor warning them, but merely stating facts, which everyone concerned should know.

Gandhiji appreciated the tone of this statement. It was only reasonable that Indian Officers should be polite, but had the statement been approved by an English Officer, Gandhiji felt it must be regarded as a major change and an auspicious beginning for the forthcoming struggle. He denied the implied charge that the agriculturists of Bardoli had been kept in ignorance of the consequences of what they were being asked to undertake. Everyone had been

told that the Government could take away and sell all his crop; could take away his cattle and other movable property; could forfeit all Inami land; could imprison whom they liked; and could cut off, if need be, all communication by rail, post and telegraph etc., and virtually besiege the people of the Taluka. It was only when the people showed their readiness peacefully to suffer all this and more that they were considered ready for the struggle.

Gandhiji and Vallabhbhai had satisfied themselves regarding the fitness of Bardoli for the struggle, but in order to make assurance doubly sure, Gandhiji asked Vithalbhai Patel to inspect the Taluka and give his independent view. Vithalbhai commenced his enquiry on the 24th of January, with Bardoli as his headquarters. On the 30th he publicly announced his findings at the Bardoli Taluka Conference which was called to approve the decision to launch the Satyagraha, and which was attended by Gandhiji, Vallabhbhai and other members of the Working Committee who were still at liberty. He said:

> "Out of a total population of 87,000, roughly 30,000 are Patidars, 45,000 Dublas * and other Raniparaj, 3,000 Mussalmans, 3,000 Anavil Brahmins †, 2,000 Baniyas ‡ and about the same number of 'untouchables'. The Baniyas and the Brahmins are neither in favour of the struggle nor against it. 75 per cent of the Patidars are whole-heartedly in favour of the struggle and are prepared to make whatever sacrifices they are called upon to make. No attempt has yet been made to win over the Dubla and Raniparaj, but their relationship with Patidars is such that they will do whatever the latter ask them to do. There appears to exist complete unity between Hindus, Muslims and other communities. The progress that the Taluka has made towards the removal of untouchability is satisfactory. A large number of upper class people accompanied me when I visited 'untouchable' homes and localities in villages, and they did so without any hesitation. Not enough work has yet been done for the admission of 'untouchable' children in the national schools, but what has been done is sufficient to justify going ahead with the decision to

* A backward class, usually landless agricultural workers.

† A Brahmin sect, very largely engaged in farming and commerce.

‡ Essentially trading and money-lending community, who had over the years come to own considerable areas of land which they got cultivated by Patidars or agricultural labour.

launch the Civil Disobedience Movement. Liquor and toddy shops are far too numerous for so small a Taluka but in the main only the Dubla and Raniparaj are addicted to drink. If the Patidars take the matter into their hands, they will be able to achieve effective control over liquor and toddy shops. There is very little crime in the Taluka and the people are generally not in the habit of going to law courts. The vast majority of disputes are settled privately. There is no reason to apprehend a breach of the peace; order and non-violence will be maintained."

After completing his assessment of the local conditions for the purpose of the forthcoming struggle, Vithalbhai warned the people of the Taluka who had assembled at the Conference, of what lay ahead of them. The Government would take their property or their ornaments or their cattle just as readily as the standing crop. The Government had the right to seize all their property, movable and immovable. The Government would not hesitate to adopt even unfair methods to gain its ends. Only if everyone was prepared to put up with all this, should they join the movement. On the one hand, they would be helping India to achieve independence, on the other they might have to hand over their property and their life as mere trifles. It was possible that the whole of Bardoli Taluka might disappear from the map.

Gandhiji too explained in detail what risks the people would have to run and what preparations must be made if the Civil Disobedience Movement was to be started, and carried through successfully. Independence was not to be won by the mere show of hands; it could be achieved only by being ready to hand over all property, and to face ruination and even death if need be.

It was not necessary for Vallabhbhai to speak, for Gandhiji and Vithalbhai had said all that required to be said. He occupied himself in studying the people very carefully and concluded that if they could only be guided properly, if only their confidence could be gained, they would gladly follow the path of sacrifice. He made full use of this knowledge in 1928 during the Bardoli struggle; and again in the great Satyagraha campaigns of 1930 and 1932 in Bardoli.

The Conference then proceeded to pass unanimously and with enthusiasm an omnibus resolution, claiming that Bardoli was prepared for mass Civil Disobedience ; that it should be given the first opportunity to sacrifice itself for the country ; and that until a fresh decision was taken, all those people from the Taluka who were prepared to abide by the conditions laid down by the Congress should refrain from paying the land revenue assessment.

Abbas Tyabji, the revered leader of Anand Taluka, was naturally unhappy that his Taluka did not get the inestimable privilege of launching mass Civil Disobedience in the country, but he readily congratulated Bardoli and gave it his blessings. It was a friendly and ennobling rivalry.

Some unkindly critics remarked that the people of Bardoli were simple and not very staunch, and that Gandhiji was making a great mistake in putting his trust in them. Gandhiji's reply to this criticism was typical. He said :

> "I am always making mistakes, and God is always putting me right. Even if people mislead me a thousand times, how can I distrust them ? So long as I see the slightest justification for trusting people, I will trust them. It would be folly to trust anyone when there was a definite reason for distrusting him, but it would be even more foolish to distrust anyone on mere suspicion. Trust begets trust. The people of Bardoli have spoken to me so frankly that it seems to me a sin to distrust them. I started my talks with their representatives with an open mind; it is they who have instilled in me confidence in them. The people of Bardoli are simple and straightforward. They do not care for luxuries. They are neither rich nor are they beggars. They are not quarrelsome nor are they without spirit. They are affectionate and do not quarrel among themselves. They have maintained good relations with the officials. They have no local difficulties and their request for participating in the struggle is wholly unselfish. They have tried hard to be fit for the struggle. They have not become wholly Swadeshi-minded (meaning in this context, using only handspun and handwoven cloth) but have striven towards that end. Nowhere else has untouchability been removed to the extent it has been here. I believe, therefore, that if any Taluka can be regarded as fit for this struggle, that Taluka is Bardoli."

The Congress Working Committee met at Surat on the 31st and Gandhiji put before it the draft of a long letter he was writing to the Viceroy, and obtained its approval. In brief, he requested the Viceroy, before the Civil Disobedience Movement was inaugurated at Bardoli, to change his policy, to release all political prisoners, to allow all peaceful activities of the Congress in regard to the Khilafat, Independence etc., to be conducted without interference, and to ensure freedom to the Press. "In putting forward these requests", said Gandhiji, "I am asking for nothing more than that you adopt a policy similar to that which obtains in all other civilized countries." The letter went on to say that if within seven days of its publication, the Viceroy accepted the requests Gandhiji would advise the Congress to postpone the launching of the militant Civil Disobedience Movement until the whole situation could be reconsidered in consultation with the Congressmen who were then in prison. By accepting these requests, he went on to say, the Government would be proving its intention to respect popular opinion.

In its reply to this letter, the Government claimed that it was not at fault in any way and that, on the other hand, it was the non-co-operators alone who were responsible for all the trouble. Thus, for instance, in regard to the charges of restrictions on the freedom of speech or of assembly, the Government blandly stated that it had become necessary to impose these restrictions because of the unreasonableness of the non-co-operators. It ignored the other charges. In reply to this, Gandhiji gave instances of robbery, beating, burning of Khadi, and raids on Congress offices at the Government's instigation or by its officers. Simultaneously, Gandhiji issued daily leaflets addressed to the people of Bardoli designed to educate them in the principles and methods of Civil Disobedience.

Then, all of a sudden, came the very horrifying news of the violence committed in U. P. by the people in a village of Gorakhpur District, named Chauri Chaura. A procession had been taken out in that village. The police irritated and abused the people who were following the procession. The

latter shouted ; on hearing this uproar, the main procession, which had gone ahead some distance, turned back. The police fired upon it until its ammunition was exhausted, and then went inside the police station and bolted themselves in. The crowd was enraged and set fire to the police station ; when that forced the policemen to come out, it hacked them to pieces and flung them into the blazing fire. In all, 21 policemen and a young son of the sub-inspector were killed. In defence, the people urged that what the police did on this occasion was merely the last of a continuing series of hardships, humiliations and tortures which they had for some time past been inflicting on the people of the district. For Gandhiji, this, however, constituted no defence. He felt that whatever ill-treatment the people had received at the hands of the police earlier, it was wholly indefensible for them to have killed them in this brutal manner, when the police had become completely helpless and were at their mercy. It was particularly unforgivable for a crowd which claimed to be non-violent and desirous of achieving independence by clean methods. Minor disturbances had occurred elsewhere also. Gandhiji felt that it would not be proper to start mass Civil Disobedience in Bardoli in an atmosphere so surcharged with violence. He had been given authority to suspend Civil Disobedience but he considered it advisable to consult such of the members of the Working Committee as were still at liberty. His mental agony was great. In an article entitled " Stab in the Back ", he said :

> " 'But what about your manifesto to the Viceroy and your rejoinder to his reply' ? spoke the voice of Satan. It was the bitterest cup of humiliation to drink. 'Surely it is cowardly to withdraw the next day after pompous threats to the Government and promises to the people of Bardoli.' Thus Satan's invitation was to deny Truth and therefore Religion, to deny God Himself. I put my doubts and troubles before the Working Committee and other associates whom I found near me. They did not all agree with me at first. Some of them probably do not even now agree with me. But never has a man been blessed, perhaps, with colleagues and associates so considerate and forgiving as I have. They understood my difficulty and patiently followed my argument."

The Working Committee Session continued for two days, 11th and the 12th of February, and finally decided on an expression of profound regret at the inhuman atrocities of Chauri Chaura; on the suspension of the mass Civil Disobedience Movement until an atmosphere of complete non-violence was re-created; on payment of Government taxes, payment of which had been suspended; and on continuance of only such activities of the Congress as were not designed to invite imprisonment. It was decided also to continue the picketing of liquor shops, but only through specially selected people of very good character.

The Working Committee felt it necessary at the same time to give to the people a positive programme for the future, and directed that efforts should be made to enrol at least ten million persons as members of the Congress; only such persons, however, were to be enlisted as regarded truth and non-violence to be absolutely indispensable. Among other tasks imposed were increase in the production of Khadi, establishment of national schools, improvement in the condition of 'untouchables', and propaganda against drink.

Gandhiji fasted for 5 days for the Chauri Chaura crime, and announced publicly that he was undertaking the fast not only as penance for himself, but also as a token punishment to the guilty people of Chauri Chaura. He said:

> "When a lover is hurt, he does not penalize his beloved but suffers himself. He starves himself and breaks his head against a stone wall. To him it matters little, whether his beloved understands it or not."

On the 25th of February, a meeting was held in Delhi of the All-India Congress Committee, and it accepted the Working Committee's resolution with slight changes. Gandhiji saw, however, that only a few members of the Congress Committee really approved of the resolution, and that the others voted for it not because they agreed with it but only out of their regard for him. He was very hurt. The people of Bardoli were disappointed at the suspension of Civil Disobedience. The volunteers there had worked day and night to prepare the Taluka for the great strife. The Kheda District and particularly Anand were not permitted to stage

mass Civil Disobedience but had received permission for individual Civil Disobedience. Accordingly, some there had not paid land revenue. They were all disappointed, but they had unshakable faith in Gandhiji and so they accepted without question his advice to suspend Civil Disobedience and took up Khadi and other constructive activities. Politicians, however, and young men who wanted a political fight found it difficult to accept Gandhiji's advice. They felt that it was wrong to suspend mass Civil Disobedience merely because violence took place in one part of the country, for such disturbances could be organized by our opponents and by the Government whenever and wherever they wished. Besides, one may acquire great control over the people but in spite of it some elements were always liable to be influenced by stray unforeseen factors which might lead to disturbances.

Gandhiji's decision shocked Lala Lajpat Rai and Pandit Motilal Nehru who were in jail. They were angry and wrote to Gandhiji before the All-India Congress Committee met in Delhi, pointing out that this decision would mean a great setback to the freedom movement. People would lose heart, and both inside and outside the country, the Congress would suffer in prestige. Many inside and outside the jail felt that at that particular moment, the Congress was very strong and the people were not in the least frightened by the Government's repressive policy. Everything pointed to victory. The Viceroy had himself confessed publicly that the Government was baffled and confused. And it was just at such a moment that Gandhiji decided to suspend the struggle. In doing so, they felt, he clearly committed a big mistake. In November 1923 the Governor of Bombay said in a discussion with an English journalist :

> "Just a thin spindly shrimp of a fellow he was, but he swayed 320 million people and held them at his beck and call. He did not care for material things, and preached nothing but the ideals and morals of India. You can't govern a country with ideals. Still that was where he got his grip upon the people. He was their God. India must always have its God. First it was Tilak, then Gandhi, some one else tomorrow. He gave us a scare. His programme filled our gaols. You can't go on arresting people for ever, you know — not when there are 320 million of them, and if

they had taken his next step and refused to pay taxes, God knows where we should have been! Gandhi's was the most colossal experiment in the world's history, and it came within an inch of succeeding. But he couldn't control men's passions. They became violent, and he called off his programme."

Except Gandhiji, most other leaders felt that to stop the struggle because an excited Satyagrahi crowd committed atrocities in one corner of the country was politically unwise. Vithalbhai who had been taking keen interest in the Bardoli struggle from the beginning did not in the least like Gandhiji's decision. Only Vallabhbhai and Rajendrababu accepted Gandhiji's decision without a word of opposition or criticism, and in a spirit of understanding faith. Jawaharlal Nehru analysed the situation very well in his autobiography :

"As a matter of fact even the suspension of civil resistance in February 1922 was certainly not due to Chauri Chaura alone, although most people imagined so. That was only the last straw. Gandhiji has often acted almost by instinct; by long and close association with the masses he appears to have developed, as great popular leaders often do, a new sense which tells him how the mass feels, what it does and what it can do. He reacts to this instinctive feeling and fashions his action accordingly, and later, for the benefit of his surprised and resentful colleagues, tries to clothe his decision with reasons. This covering is often very inadequate, as it seemed after Chauri Chaura. At that time our movement, in spite of its apparent power and the widespread enthusiasm, was going to pieces. All organization and discipline was disappearing; almost all our good men were in prison, and the masses had so far received little training to carry on by themselves. Any unknown man who wanted to do so could take charge of a Congress Committee and, as a matter of fact, large numbers of undesirable men, including *agent provocateurs*, came to the front and even controlled some local Congress and Khilafat organizations. There was no way of checking them.

"This kind of thing is, of course, to some extent almost inevitable in such a struggle. The leaders must take the lead in going to prison, and trust to others to carry on. All that can be done is to train the masses in some simple kinds of activity and, even more so, to abstain from certain other kinds of activity. In 1930 we had already spent several years in giving some such training, and the Civil Disobedience movement then and in 1932 was a very powerful and organized affair. This was lacking in 1921 and 1922, and there was little behind the excitement and

> enthusiasm of the people. There is little doubt that if the movement had continued there would have been growing sporadic violence in many places. This would have been crushed by the Government in a bloody manner and a reign of terror established which would have thoroughly demoralized the people.
>
> "These were probably the reasons and influences that worked in Gandhiji's mind, and granting his premises and the desirability of carrying on with the technique of non-violence, his decision was right. He had to stop the rot and build anew."

Hitherto, the initiative had been with the Congress. Gandhiji kept putting before the country new schemes and programmes, and the country as a whole welcomed them and made them its own. These programmes and schemes were so novel and yet so sound that the Government did not find it easy to decide what to do in regard to them. It often resorted to short-sighted measures of repression and tyranny which in their turn only led to increased bitterness and opposition. Except in Gujarat, almost all the leaders had been arrested. Nevertheless there had been no falling off in the enthusiasm of the people. If anything, their enthusiasm increased. Gandhiji openly called the present Government a "Satanic Government" and said that it should be destroyed. Nevertheless it did not dare arrest him. The authorities were afraid that his arrest might lead to rebellion in the Indian Army and Police. But as soon as Gandhiji decided to suspend the struggle, the Government picked up courage. Lord Birkenhead in a speech in the Parliament remarked that 'Britain had lost none of her hard fibre.' Even Montague who had talked of the desirability of giving India the right to rule over herself immediately, said :

> "If the existence of our Empire were challenged, the discharge of responsibilities of the British Government to India prevented and demands were made in the very mistaken belief that we contemplated retreat — from India — then India would not challenge with success the most-determined people in the world, who would once again answer the challenge with all the vigour and determination at its command."

These remarks were an attempt to reply to the challenge which Gandhiji had thrown out to the British Empire in his letter to the Viceroy. Gandhiji gave a fitting

reply in *Young India** to both Lord Birkenhead and Mr Montague.

"Both Lord Birkenhead and Mr Montague little know that India is prepared for all 'the hard fibre' that can be transported across the seas, and that her challenge was issued in the September of 1920 at Calcutta that India would be satisfied with nothing less than Swaraj and full redress of the Khilafat and the Punjab wrongs. This does involve the existence of the 'Empire' and if the present custodians of the British Empire are not satisfied with its quiet transformation into a true Commonwealth of free nations, each with equal rights and each having the power to secede at will from an honourable and friendly partnership, all the determination and vigour of 'the most determined people in the world' and the 'hard fibre' will have to be spent in India in a vain effort to crush the spirit that has risen and that will neither bend nor break. It is true that we have no 'hard fibre'. But the rice-eating, puny millions of India seem to have resolved upon achieving their own destiny without any further tutelage and without arms. In the Lokamanya's language it is their 'birthright' and they will have it in spite of the 'hard fibre' and in spite of the vigour and determination with which it may be administered. India cannot and will not answer this insolence with insolence, but if she remains true to her pledge, her prayer to God to be delivered from such a scourge will certainly not go in vain. No empire intoxicated with the red wine of power and plunder of weaker races has yet lived long in this world, and this 'British Empire', which is based upon organized exploitation of physically weaker races of the earth and upon a continuous exhibition of brute force, cannot live if there is a just God ruling the universe. Little do these so-called representatives of the British nation realize that India has already given many of her best men to be dealt with by the British 'hard fibre'. Had Chauri Chaura not interrupted the even course of the national sacrifice, there would have been still greater and more delectable offerings placed before the Lion, but God had willed it otherwise. There is nothing, however, to prevent all those representatives in Downing Street and Whitehall from doing their worst.

After this exchange of plain speaking, Gandhiji was arrested and tried as the writer of three articles in *Young India*, which were regarded as seditious, and he and Shankarlal Banker, as the Publisher, were charged with sedition. Both pleaded guilty. Gandhiji's written statement

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* A Weekly English Journal edited by Gandhiji and which preceded *Harijan*. Its Gujarati counterpart was *Navajivan*.

before the court has acquired a high place in the memorable literature of the world. When he read that statement in the court, one got the impression that instead of his being tried for sedition, it was the British Empire which was on trial for the betrayal of the people. The judge also, in sentencing him, expressed himself eloquently :

"Mr Gandhi, you have made my task easy in one way by pleading guilty to the charge. Nevertheless what remains, namely the determination of a just sentence, is perhaps as difficult a proposition as a judge in this country could have to face. The law is no respecter of persons. Nevertheless it will be impossible to ignore the fact that you are in a different category from any person I have ever tried or am likely to have to try. It would be impossible to ignore the fact that in the eyes of millions of your countrymen, you are a great patriot and a great leader. Even those who differ from you in politics look upon you as a man of high ideals and of noble and of even saintly life. I have to deal with you in one character only. It is not my duty and I do not presume to judge or criticize you in any other character. It is my duty to judge you as a man subject to the laws who by his own admission has broken the law and committed what to an ordinary man must appear to be grave offence against the State. I do not forget that you have consistently preached against violence and that you have on many occasions, as I am willing to believe, done much to prevent violence. But having regard to the nature of your political teaching and the nature of many of those to whom it was addressed, how you could have continued to believe that violence would not be the inevitable consequence, it passes my capacity to understand.

"There are probably few people in India, who do not sincerely regret that you should have made it impossible for any government to leave you at liberty. But it is so. I am trying to balance what is due to you against what appears to me to be necessary in the interests of the public, and I propose in passing sentence to follow the precedent of a case in many respects similar to this case that was decided some twelve years ago. I mean the case against Bal Gangadhar Tilak under the same section. The sentence that was passed upon him as it finally stood was a sentence of simple imprisonment for six years. You will not consider it unreasonable, I think, that you should be classed with Mr Tilak, i.e. a sentence of two years simple imprisonment on each count of the charge; six years in all, which I feel it my duty to pass upon you, and I should like to say in doing so that if the course of events in India should make it possible for the

Government to reduce the period and release you, no one will be better pleased than I."

Shankarlal Banker was sentenced to a year's imprisonment and Rs. 1,000 fine. Gandhiji thanked the judge for his extremely courteous behaviour and for treating him on a par with Lokmanya Tilak. As Gandhiji bowed to all in the court, many were not able to control themselves and sobbed aloud. Gandhiji was fully self-possessed and smiled to those present. When he finished taking leave of them, the Police Superintendent conducted Gandhiji and Shankarlal Banker to the Sabarmati Jail.

CHAPTER XIX
AFTER GANDHIJI'S IMPRISONMENT

During the preceding year and a half, Gandhiji had set his colleagues and co-workers so many tasks of importance and urgency that they were kept fully occupied day and night. Thanks to the sheer excitement of purposeful work and a feeling of exaltation, it left in them no sense of fatigue or exhaustion. Gandhiji's last message, as he entered prison, was—"let there be more, ever more Khadi, and Swaraj will follow." It was one thing, however, to popularize the spinning wheel at the height of the movement against the Government, and an entirely different thing to do so in a less militant and more pacific atmosphere. Vallabhbhai was called upon, thus, to carry a heavy and difficult responsibility. So long as Gandhiji was out, although Vallabhbhai had plenty to do, he at least was saved the anxieties of full leadership. Now, however, he had to keep all his colleagues and workers of varying temperaments and outlooks united and working together. It was his responsibility to assign to each of them work he was most fitted to discharge. He had to sustain the morale and the enthusiasm of the people and to re-create such an atmosphere in the country that the Government would be compelled to release Gandhiji before he had fully served his six years' sentence of imprisonment.

Although Vallabhbhai had not yet come to be regarded as an All-India leader, his position as leader in Gujarat was unquestioned. There he was *the* leader. Whatever the other

provinces decided to do, whether they followed the path laid down by Gandhiji or not, Vallabhbhai was quite determined to see that Gujarat at least adhered to the programme of work fixed by Gandhiji, and that all the organizations which were engaged in Gujarat in constructive work functioned efficiently and with vigour. If circumstances justified it or necessitated it, he was prepared, even in Gandhiji's absence, to resist the Government on specific issues through Civil Disobedience. And it so happened that a series of difficult problems did arise and Vallabhbhai was able to surmount them and to achieve the objectives he had set for himself and for Gujarat.

Whatever Vallabhbhai may have thought of the responsibility which now fell upon him, he carried it lightly like an experienced and born leader. On the day after Gandhiji's imprisonment, he appealed to the men and women of Gujarat thus :

> "Many sacrifices have been offered by India to the British Lion, but never before had it been its good fortune to receive so sacred a prey. It will not, however, be very easy for it to digest such a prey. Once before, in April 1919, it had endeavoured to seize this prey but had to drop it almost as it had seized it. This time, however, the Lion is thoroughly roused. Its eyes are red with anger and for some time now it has been shaking its magnificent mane in futile fury. But the *rishis* and *munis* of India have before now with the help of their *yoga* converted many a ferocious lion into creatures milder than lambs. On this occasion too, the great spiritual strength of our Mahatma will transform the raging Lion into a mild lamb.
>
> "Now indeed is the testing time. Gandhiji has indicated to us clearly wherein lies our duty and if we wish to show our genuine regard and affection for him, all of us, irrespective of caste and creed, should busy ourselves so that we can successfully fulfil the programme set before us. The rest of India may not easily understand him but Gujarat has no excuse. It behoves Gujarat to carry out the injunctions which have come from his transparently pure heart."

Vallabhbhai followed up this appeal by an article entitled "The Test of Faith" in which he indicated what it was possible for Gandhiji's colleagues to do.

> "Now that Gandhiji has gone, what ought his colleagues and disciples to do ? There is no one among them of such outstanding

character and ability as could adequately step into his shoes and push his activities forward. His followers are indeed weak and have many shortcomings. His colleagues have neither his sweetness of manner nor that complete self-control that is so essential in public life. Fortunately, they are fully conscious of their numerous defects. But a mason does not claim to have the ability of the Planning Architect; yet he experiences no difficulty in completing a structure in accordance with the plan drawn by the Architect. In the same way, if Gandhiji's colleagues have thoroughly understood Gandhiji's plan for the achievement of independence, they will have no difficulty in working to implement that plan.

They must keep in mind Gandhiji's doctrine of non-violence, his boundless affection and love, his indefatigable energy and his passion for independence, and if they too like him work tirelessly, they will be able to prove their loyalty to him and fulfil his programme for the achievement of independence."

Vallabhbhai's words fell on willing ears, and under his guidance, Gujarat kept to the straight and narrow path laid down by Gandhiji.

In other Provinces, however, there was a lack of adequate faith in Gandhiji's programme, and so the Congress began very soon to speak with discordant voices. From the inception of the Non-co-operation Movement, the Leaders of Maharashtra had expressed their dissatisfaction with it. In particular, they disliked the boycott of the Legislatures. They had hoped that after the new reforms they would be able to fulfil their long-cherished ambition of going into the Legislatures. When the Moderates, who had entered the Legislatures began giving direct or indirect support to the repressive policy of the Government, these Congressmen claimed that if they had been in the Legislatures, they would have resisted this repressive policy of the Government, and even if they failed to influence the Government, they would have been able to show up to the world the hollowness of the Government's reforms. And so, in the month of April when the Second Maharashtra Political Conference met in Poona, certain modifications were proposed in the programme of the Congress. Gandhiji's hold on the masses was, however, still great and the proposal did not receive the support of the majority. Nevertheless, a

committee was appointed to enquire once again into the Non-co-operation programme. The Nagpur Provincial Congress Committee also decided to carry out a similar review. In placing so complete an emphasis on the principle of non-violence and self-sacrifice, the Congress, it was felt, had definitely made a mistake. In Bengal too the atmosphere was beginning to be confused. Shrimati Vasanti Devi, Deshbandhu's wife, while urging a vigorous pursuit of the programme of non-violence, urged at the same time that, if need be, the popular struggle should be pushed forward by going into the Legislatures. Thus, almost immediately after Gandhiji was imprisoned, the foundation was laid for the division of the Congress into two parties — those in favour of the Non-co-operation programme and those against it.

On the 25th and 26th of May, the Sixth Gujarat Political Conference was held at Anand under the Presidentship of Kasturba *. That Conference reiterated the vital importance of constructive work. In view of the discussion which had started in the country regarding the entry into the Legislatures, the Conference, after very full consideration of the entire question, unanimously expressed itself in favour of the basic principles of non-co-operation and against co-operation with the administration.

In the month of June, the All-India Congress Committee met at Lucknow, and it was clear from the discussion that took place there that the majority of the members of that Committee had not understood the real significance of carrying on the struggle in accordance with the principles of Satyagraha. Whether the constructive part of the programme was fulfilled or not, they were anxious to start the Civil Disobedience Movement. At the same time, they did not wish to admit the fact that they had no interest in constructive work. They, therefore, contended that there was no enthusiasm among the people for such work and that only if the Civil Disobedience Movement was started could such enthusiasm be generated. In the end, at the instance of Vithalbhai, a Committee was appointed, which was to tour

* Wife of Mahatma Gandhi.

the country, appraise the extent to which the country was ready for Civil Disobedience and submit its reports. This Committee was known as the Civil Disobedience Committee but wherever it went in the country, its visit became the occasion for a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of participation in the Legislatures. In order to protect Gujarat from all this confused thinking and to give it a definite lead, Vallabhbhai advised workers in Gujarat to keep themselves busy with constructive work, and not to engage themselves in discussion on future policy.

Compared to other Provinces, quite solid work had already been done in Gujarat in regard to national education. At the Gujarat Vidyapith, 250 students were receiving training. In all the Vinay and Kumar Mandirs (that is, in High Schools and Primary Schools affiliated to the Vidyapith) of Gujarat some 37,000 students were studying. The Library of the Vidyapith contained over 75,000 books. The Vidyapith, however, did not have a building of its own. Vallabhbhai, therefore, appealed for a million rupees to be collected before the 2nd of October, Gandhiji's Birthday. This, as Vallabhbhai pointed out, was a very light and simple test of our devotion. If a man failed in a difficult test, it constituted no disgrace. But the simpler the test, the more shameful the failure. If a student of the 7th standard were to sit for an examination in the 3rd standard, he must pass first ; if he failed he deserved to drown himself. Indeed, it would be far better for him to leave school if he secures a mere pass. "We are," concluded Vallabhbhai, "like these students of the 7th standard in this struggle. We were prepared to start the Civil Disobedience struggle in Bardoli. Compared to that the task of collecting a million rupees from Gujarat should be like preparing for an examination in the 3rd standard. The examination is easy and because it is easy we must pass it with flying colours." The appeal met with good response. Precisely, on the 2nd of October, the figure of a million was reached.

Almost immediately Vallabhbhai proceeded to assign another task to Gujarat. On the 16th of October 1922 the Gujarat Provincial Committee decided that foreign cloth

shops should be picketed. Every volunteer, who was desirous of undertaking this task was called upon to sign a pledge in the following terms :

"I shall prove to the Committee appointed for the task of enrolling volunteers that I have persuaded every member of my family, whom I am in a position to influence, to give up the use of foreign cloth."

In appealing for volunteers for this work, Vallabhbhai said :

"Gujarat has money. It has organizing ability. It has moderation. But it cannot be gainsaid that there is a dearth of volunteer workers in Gujarat. Every Gujarati, who has love for his country, must dedicate one of his sons for the work of the country. All patriotic young men of Gujarat and Kathiawad should pledge themselves to the service of their country until such time as Gandhiji is released. If you wish to keep up the prestige of Gujarat, give up idleness ; otherwise, as time passes, it will be said that while the world recognized the greatness of Gandhiji, it was only Gujarat which failed to do so."

He also appealed to the foreign cloth dealers in the following terms :

"Would you rather that the workers of Gujarat give up all their other work for the service of Gujarat in order to picket your shops ? Will you not close your business in foreign cloth so long as Gandhiji is in jail ? If you will take the first step, it is possible that the whole country will follow in your footsteps and Gandhiji may well be freed from the jail much earlier."

In order to ensure that the picketing was carried out peacefully and with politeness, Vallabhbhai published over his signature a set of instructions to be observed by his army of volunteers. These instructions went into great detail and covered all aspects of picketing. Volunteers were advised to give their names and addresses to the Police on demand, and even to allow themselves to be arrested if the Police so desired. They were, above all, told very firmly that however violent the attitude of others towards them, they were to keep their peace and suffer without retaliation any violence inflicted on them.

Picketing was inaugurated in Ahmedabad on the 1st of December. In the morning there was a programme of processional singing through the city and thereafter there was sale of Khadi. Vallabhbhai, Abbassaheb and

Dr. Kanuga followed by a long stream of volunteers went to the foreign cloth market area. Women volunteers established a siege of the Cloth Market of Ratanpol which dealt mainly with women's clothing. This was followed by picketing in every village throughout Gujarat. In some villages even while volunteers were being recruited, merchants had begun to pledge themselves not to send for any more foreign cloth. In Ahmedabad a number of cloth merchants undertook *not* to purchase any more foreign cloth — some for 6 months, and some for 9 months. At Surat and Nadiad merchants undertook to refrain from purchasing foreign cloth for a year, while the merchants of Surat and Bharuch districts went even further and undertook not to purchase foreign cloth so long as the Congress programme remained unaltered. Wherever such pledges were obtained, the picketing ceased.

Some Congress as well as outside leaders began to criticize such short-term pledges by merchants. In a public speech in Ahmedabad, Vallabhbhai replied to this criticism, pointing out the basic fact that if the boycott of foreign cloth was to be a success, it was for the people themselves to refrain from using and purchasing foreign cloth. The merchants would then of their own accord stop importing foreign cloth for there would be no market for it. It was unreasonable to criticize only the merchants. Critics and others must remember their own faults also.

> "Judging from what I have learnt about them", said Vallabhbhai, "in the course of the last few days since this campaign started, I can assure you that the various epithets which we have been using when referring to them — scoundrels, dishonest fellows, thieves — are all epithets which could more appropriately be applied to us rather than to them. We did not have any business commitments. All we had to do was to set fire to the foreign clothes we might have in our houses worth a hundred or two hundred rupees. We had at the most to withdraw from Government Schools one or two of our boys. We might have had to contribute some money for running the National Schools in which our children are now studying. But did we do any of these things ? For the merchants, on the other hand, it is a question of giving up their sole or main source of livelihood. We do not examine our own actions and are only too anxious to ask

others to render account. It is our duty today to encourage the merchants in the good start they have made and *not* to say anything which would render their task more difficult and make them despair. If during this intervening period we all change over to the use of Indian cloth, why would they want to import any more foreign cloth ?"

A minor, though significant, incident may be described here, as it shows how little people had yet appreciated the importance of constructive work. In the month of November, the Kathiawad Political Conference was held under the Presidentship of Abbassaheb. It recommended the abolition of untouchability. In this Conference, a separate block had been set aside for the 'untouchables' or Harijans, as they came to be known later. A volunteer was instructing the Harijans not to touch other visitors and to sit in the block set aside for them. The Harijans were complying with these instructions without any hesitation. As soon as Vallabhbhai saw this, he got up and went and sat in their midst. Darbarsaheb Gopaldas and his wife, Bhaktilakshmi, followed him. This made the Harijan Block the centre of the Conference. Vallabhbhai made his speech from there but made no reference to the incident. Why should he do so ? It was far more effective thus to remain silent.

In this manner persuading everybody, appreciating the difficulties of different sections of the people, and showing his sympathy towards their weaknesses, Vallabhbhai was endeavouring to push forward constructive work in Gujarat. In the meantime, the atmosphere in the country was beginning to be more and more confused as a result of the doubts in the minds of the leaders on the wisdom of the boycott of Legislatures. In June, Pandit Motilalji and in August, Deshbandhu Das were released. The Civil Disobedience Sub-Committee appointed by the All-India Congress Committee at Lucknow was still touring the country. One of its members, Vithalbhai was 'educating' the public to accept participation in the Legislatures. Pandit Motilalji was appointed a member of this Committee. He too inclined to think that it was desirable to enter the Legislatures. Deshbandhu Das had been of this view ever since the Calcutta Conference of 1920. He had allowed

himself to be persuaded by Gandhiji at the Nagpur Congress but in the December of 1921, he had written from jail to Gandhiji advising him to accept Lord Reading's proposal regarding the Round Table Conference. Gandhiji, however, did not accept that suggestion. Again in February 1922 he had indicated from the jail his opposition to the resolution postponing the conflict. Nevertheless, Gandhiji had the resolution passed by the Congress Committee in Delhi. Ever since, Deshbandhu had lost confidence in Gandhiji's method. As soon as he came out, he publicly put forward his original policy, namely, to destroy the Legislatures from within and not from without. On the 5th of November 1922 the Civil Disobedience Enquiry Committee published its report. Its unanimous view was that the country was not prepared for Civil Disobedience on a large scale, that therefore the Provincial Congress Committees should be given authority only to authorize Civil Disobedience on a restricted basis on its own responsibility wherever it considered it desirable to violate a particular law or to refuse to pay a particular tax. On the subject of entry into the Legislatures, the views of the Committee were equally divided. Hakim Ajmal Khan, Pandit Motilalji and Vithalbhai were of the view that the Congress should enter the Legislatures and should endeavour to make them unworkable. Dr. Ansari, Rajaji and Kasturi Ranga Iyengar were of the view that there should be no change in the Congress programme relating to the boycott of the Legislatures. Deshbandhu Das was not a member of this Committee, and although, as the President-elect of the Congress Session to be held at Gaya, it was desirable that he should maintain a neutral attitude, he stated publicly that he himself was in favour of participating in the Legislatures and argued that if we oppose the Government in the Legislatures, we would not be committing any breach of the principle of non-co-operation. Then on 20th of October 1922, the report was placed successively before the Working Committee of the Congress and before the All-India Congress Committee. Again, the voting was equally divided. On the first day in the All-India

Congress Committee, Vallabhbhai proposed that as there had been delay in the publication of the Report of the Enquiry Committee and the full session of the Congress was shortly to be held in Gaya, it should be left to the Congress as a whole to take a decision on the report. Nevertheless, after a discussion lasting over four days, the All-India Congress Committee decided to come to a final conclusion.

Rajaji considered it advisable to state publicly his standpoint. He declared :

> "It is my definite conviction that if the Congress accepts now the policy of participation in the Legislatures, in any form whatever, it will mean the end of non-co-operation. How can I forswear that conviction of mine for the sake of unanimity ? What would be more fortunate for me than that I should be a follower of Hakimsaheb and Panditji ? I have, however, not been able to satisfy my conscience that it will be right for me to suppress something about which I am firmly convinced."

Vallabhbhai also gave expression to his views. On the 8th December the picketing of foreign cloth shops was to begin in Surat and a public meeting had been organized for that purpose on the 7th. In that meeting when Vallabhbhai was asked his opinion on Vithalbhai's argument that the entry into the Legislatures was like smuggling oneself into the enemy fort with a view to conquering it, he remarked :

> "Patelsaheb (Vithalbhai) who is a supporter of entry into the Legislatures went to England to give evidence and knows, therefore, the persons who have drafted the Constitution. They designed the Legislatures bearing in mind that people like him would enter the Legislatures, and so they provided safeguards against possible subversive activities and thus made the Legislatures practically ineffective. Therefore the fortress of the enemy is not located in the Legislatures. It lies elsewhere and so long as that remains uncaptured, this Government can continue to function even for a hundred years without a Legislature."

At the Congress Session at Gaya the question was again very hotly debated. Deshbandhu Das in his Presidential address said :

> "Our task is either to reform or to destroy these Legislatures. Until now we had boycotted them and our action has reduced their prestige. The country knows that those who are in them as members are not the true representatives of the people. Nevertheless, the Legislatures continue to function. It is, therefore, the

duty of the Congress to go inside the Legislatures and carry out a more effective boycott. The Legislatures are a new form assumed by the Bureaucracy to cover up its real activities. It is our duty to remove that cover and show up the Bureaucracy in its true colours. The idea of boycotting implies something more than merely keeping away. The meaning of the boycott of foreign cloth is that we should plan such measures as would ensure that no foreign cloth is available in our markets. In the same way, the boycott of the Legislatures means that we must remove these Legislatures since they come in the way of independence. We can only be said to have boycotted the Legislatures when we are able either so to reform them that they become a help to us in achieving our independence, or we are able to destroy them completely. I am advising the country to boycott the Legislatures in that manner. When an Army enters the enemy territory, it does not mean that it has co-operated with the enemy. In the same way, if we enter the Bureaucracy's stronghold, we are not co-operating. Everything depends upon the object with which we enter."

In his speech opposing entry into the Legislatures Vallabhbhai said:

"I am not a leader; I am a soldier. I am the son of a peasant and do not believe that we can gain independence by merely talking. We shall not be able to fight the Government on its own ground. Once we enter the Legislatures, the people will lose their enthusiasm for independence and the Congress will lose the confidence of the people. It will indeed be ruinous to the Congress. It is only when the Congress announced its policy of non-co-operation that it began to be supported by agriculturists, labourers and women. That is so because it is only such activity which gives scope for participating in the national struggle and for making sacrifices. The Government knew well before the reforms, the nature of the people with whom it had to deal. The reforms were drawn up with reference to their strong and their weak points. Even if you conducted your campaign for a hundred years, through the Legislatures, you will not get independence."

Some speakers argued that either you should start the Civil Disobedience Movement or go into the Legislatures and harass the Government, but nothing was to be gained by merely continuing the Constructive Programme. In reply Rajaji said:

"It is only by resisting Government's violence and undergoing hardships with courage and patience that we can win. The Legislative Chambers are not our battlefields. It is the vast area of this country which should be our battlefield. Our weapons are

our readiness and strength to endure hardships. I oppose council entry because such entry will do us positive harm. The Legislatures will not be of assistance to us in any way either in our constructive work or in the Civil Disobedience Movement. If instead of wasting our energy in these discussions, we had carried on constructive work with greater vigour, the country would have, by now, been ready for Civil Disobedience. Even now there is time if we work vigorously and allow ourselves to be tested fully and be prepared for sacrificing everything. If, on the other hand, we allow ourselves to be distracted into this new venture, we shall spoil all that we have achieved so far, and shall have to start afresh."

In the end, a resolution moved by Rajaji was passed by a majority. This approved the continuance of the policy of the boycott of the Legislatures and directed that no Congressman should stand for the ensuing elections.

Once this important issue was decided, the Congress proceeded to deal with the question of when the Civil Disobedience Movement should be restarted. In regard to this, Abbas Saheb Tyabji urged that the Congress should adhere to the view already accepted, namely that when all other methods had been exhausted of reforming an arbitrary and tyrannical Government which destroyed the manliness of the people, there remained, short of violent conflict, only one remedy, namely, Civil Disobedience. The public was anxious for independence and was satisfied that for achieving that objective, it would be necessary to conduct a Civil Disobedience Movement. Despite many grounds for annoyance and irritation, the country had, on the whole, maintained an atmosphere of non-violence. He suggested, therefore, that the Congress should now call upon all its workers to be prepared before the 30th April (i) to increase the number of Congress Committees and to see that they were well-organized and strong; (ii) to collect for the 'Swaraj Fund' a sum of two and a half million rupees; and (iii) to register at least 50,000 volunteers who would be prepared to carry out the pledge laid down at the Ahmedabad Congress.

Immediately after the Congress Session concluded, Deshbandhu resigned from his Presidentship and established a new party called the Swaraj Party. He himself became

its leader and Pandit Motilal its Secretary. Among the others, who joined it were Hakim Ajmal Khan, Vithalbhai and Kelkar. Deshbandhu did not consider it proper to continue as Congress President since it was his intention to try and eventually gain a majority in the Congress through this Swaraj Party in favour of his programme of entry into the Legislatures.

The Congress was now divided into two parties. Those who were in favour of adhering to the constructive work were spoken of as 'no-changers' and the others as 'changers'. The former had, as its leaders, Rajaji, Dr. Ansari, Rajendra Babu and Vallabhbhai. This division had an adverse effect on the people's attitude towards the Congress. There were still many leaders and workers in jail and they were also most unhappy at this open disruption.

Shortly after the Congress at Gaya, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and other leaders were released. As a result of their efforts at a settlement, the Congress Working Committee and the All-India Congress Committee met at Allahabad in the last week of February 1923. Although Deshbandhu Das had resigned, as the Congress had not appointed any other President, Deshbandhu was asked to take the chair. It was proposed that until the 30th of April, both sections should observe silence on the subject of entry to the Legislatures; that the Swaraj Party should assist in the task of enrolling volunteers and of collecting funds. After the 30th of April each party may go its own way. The idea behind this proposal was that the 'no-changers' intended to complete their preparations for Civil Disobedience before the 30th of April. If by that time they succeeded in preparing the country for the Civil Disobedience Movement, no question of entry into the Legislatures would arise. It was, however, not possible to implement the programme which had been laid down for completing the preparations for Civil Disobedience Movement. Before the 30th of April instead of two and a half million rupees only one and a half million were collected, and instead of 50,000 volunteers, barely 8,000 volunteers

were registered. The Swaraj Party, therefore, tried all the more to persuade the Congress to accept its programme.

Vallabhbhai was anxious to reassure the general public that despite these differences, there would be no bitterness between the two sections of the Congress. In an article in the *Navajivan* entitled "Unnecessary Fear" he argued that the temporary settlement which had been reached between the two sections at Allahabad and which was due to expire on the following day, showed clearly that a permanent agreement would have been possible only if one of the two sections were to give up its honest conviction and to accept the views of the other. But such unity could only do harm. In the long run, the country would gain by the two sections adhering firmly to their honest beliefs and continuing to work side by side. That was the only way in which the public would also learn to appreciate the issues involved.

> "There is a possibility that it may not be necessary to take stringent steps to enforce the Congress Resolution regarding the boycott of Legislatures. The Government itself has made our task easy. The Government's decision to enhance the salt tax has made it clear that the Legislatures are altogether futile. The proposal was rejected by a majority vote not once but twice. Nevertheless, the Viceroy ignored the majority and certified * the proposal. It was but natural to hope that now at least the Members of the Legislatures would be disillusioned enough to want to quit the Legislatures. What more can we do in the Legislatures than thus to defeat the Government by our majority? That has been done several times in the present session and yet whenever the Government thought it fit, it has ignored the majority view. In the circumstances one would have thought that not much argument was necessary to convince the voters of the futility of the Legislatures. Anyhow, there does not seem to be any reason to fear the growth of bitterness or disunity among the two sections of the Congress."

On the 25th of May a meeting of the All-India Congress Committee took place in Bombay. Jawaharlal Nehru had just been released. His general attitude was against the policy of change. At the same time, he was anxious to bring

* Under the then Constitution, the Viceroy had the power thus to certify any proposal as law even if it was not supported by a majority.

about a settlement between the two sections. Dr. Ansari and Mrs. Naidu were also in favour of a settlement. So also were some Provincial Congress Committees. Accordingly Purushottam Das Tandon moved a resolution supported by Jawaharlalji that in accordance with the directive of the Gaya Congress, there should be no propaganda against elections.

An objection was raised that it was unconstitutional for the All-India Congress Committee to take a decision which went against the spirit of a decision of the Congress. Deshbandhu Das, who was in the chair, ruled it in order on the ground that the resolution did not nullify the resolution of the Gaya Congress but merely recommended that propaganda in its favour should be stopped. The resolution was passed by a small majority. This led Vallabhbhai and other staunch 'no-changers' to resign from the Working Committee, which had been elected at Gaya. In their place a Working Committee of neither the staunch 'no-changers' nor of the staunch 'changers' but of those in favour of a compromise was elected.

From Bombay Deshbandhu Das went on tour to Madras. There in a speech referring to talks of a settlement with Lord Reading he said :

> "At that time, the Government was impressed by Satyagraha and had shown its preparedness to come to a settlement. I was then in jail and the conditions of settlement had been sent to me. I sent them to Gandhiji but he opposed everything and instead advised us to work the spinning wheel."

There was, in fact, no substance in Lord Reading's offer and Gandhiji had, by refusing to have anything to do with it, saved the people from falling into a dangerous trap. Vallabhbhai was stung to the quick by this attack on Gandhiji, and made a vigorous rejoinder designed to expose Deshbandhu's tactics.

> "What is the point of saying eight months after his release from jail that Gandhiji had committed a blunder by not accepting Lord Reading's offer ? Why did he not say so earlier ? Ever since he came out of jail, Deshbandhu has been attacking those holding views with which he is not in agreement, in the hope, presumably, of securing a general acceptance of his own views. For a short

time after his release, he kept quiet on the subject of entry into Legislatures and discoursed in public only on religious and philosophical matters. Some thought that perhaps he might retire into solitude like Aurobindo Ghosh. At an opportune moment, however, he has taken charge of the movement which had been set afoot by Vithalbhai and others who were members of the Civil Disobedience Committee set up by the Lucknow Conference. At the All-India Congress Committee at Calcutta, the issue was debated, but a frontal clash between the opposing parties was avoided. At the Gaya Congress, however, he joined issue with all his strength. When, however, the majority did not accept his view, he attacked the resolution of the Congress from the Presidential Chair and resigned from the Presidentship. He organized a party against the Congress and resumed his attack on the Congress policy. Finding, however, that the public was not sufficiently responsive, he accepted the Allahabad recommendation for a truce for two months. Finally on winning over the All-India Congress Committee, he has now at last regained courage and begun a frontal attack from Madras. Had he ventured to charge Mahatmaji in this bitter manner eight months ago, would anyone have listened to him ? But that would not have been Deshbandhu's way."

About the same time, Vithalbhai attacked Vallabhbhai saying that Vallabhbhai, known as the Suba * of Gujarat, had now ceased even to respect the decisions of the All-India Congress Committee and was thereby doing great harm to the prestige of the Congress. To him too Vallabhbhai gave a stinging reply :

"Patelsaheb says that there is no hope of capturing the Legislatures since there exists a difference of opinion among the workers and the leaders, and that if only the President of the Gujarat Provincial Committee would learn to respect the orders of the All-India Congress Committee the object could be achieved and the Congress gain in prestige. The Congress Organization was split some time ago, thanks to the efforts of the Swaraj Party. If the members of that party are genuinely anxious for the prestige of the Congress, they ought to wind up their party. They should give up all idea of capturing the Legislatures. If the Gujarat Provincial Committee is satisfied that one can work with self-respect in the Legislatures, it would not hesitate to advise accordingly. Gujarat knows Gandhiji far better than Patelsaheb. His party has merely made use of Gandhiji, whereas

* A Moghal term to signify the Governor or head of a province.

Gujarat is endeavouring to the best of its ability to follow in the footsteps of Gandhiji. Gandhiji will forgive Gujarat any weakness that it may show. The world will forgive it and God also. Weakness is no crime but Gujarat will never betray Gandhiji. It was not necessary for Patelsaheb to remind Gujarat that Gandhiji always respected the resolutions of the All-India Congress Committee. Gujarat also knows that when Gandhiji was free, the whole country carried out his wishes unquestioningly. Today the very leaders who do not respect the basic resolutions of the Congress itself demand that others should respect those of its resolutions which favour their point of view. Can such tactics raise the prestige of the Congress ?"

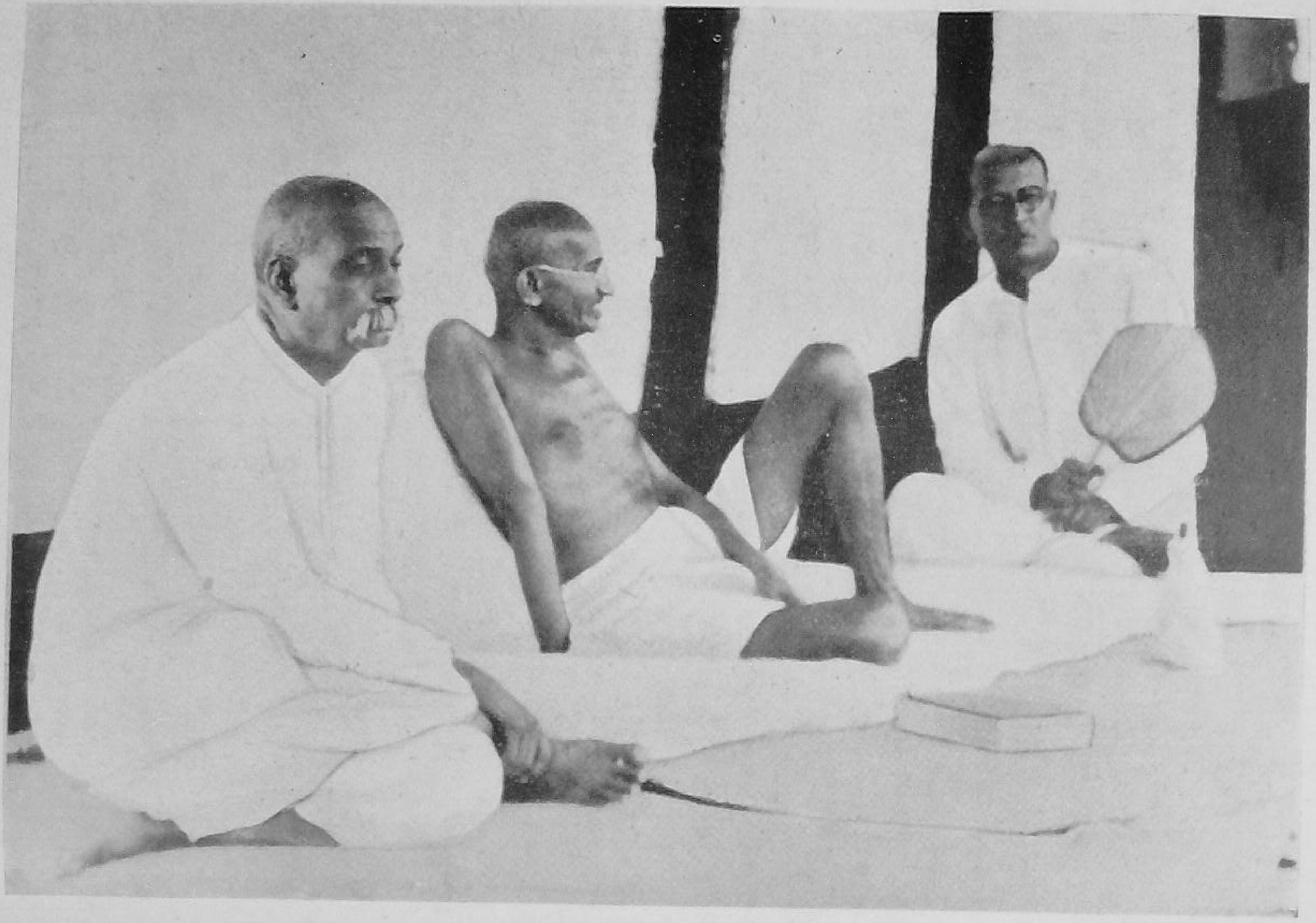
Strong difference of opinion in political matters led often enough to such vigorous argument between the two but it never affected their relationship as brothers. Whenever Vithalbhai came to Ahmedabad, he stayed with Vallabhbhai and Vallabhbhai gave him all the respect due to him as his elder brother. They very rarely discussed matters among themselves but conveyed through a third person what they wanted to say to each other. Vithalbhai always referred to Vallabhbhai as "Your Suba" or "the Suba of Gujarat" while Vallabhbhai referred to him as "the Honourable Mr Patel" or "Patelsaheb".

The resolution of the All-India Congress Committee at Bombay was described as a resolution of compromise but, in fact, it increased bitterness between the two sections. Those who were not in favour of any change maintained that the All-India Congress Committee as a committee appointed by the Congress was not competent to alter a resolution passed by the Congress. That being so, they still adhered to the resolution passed at the main Congress. The Swaraj Party, therefore, called a meeting of the All-India Congress Committee at Nagpur in July and proposed that disciplinary action should be taken against Provincial Committees which did not respect the resolution of the All-India Congress Committee at Bombay. The attack was directed in the main against Tamil Nad and Gujarat, that is against Rajaji and Vallabhbhai. Lawyers on both sides disputed on the basis of legal principles, and finally the

resolution recommending disciplinary action was lost by two votes.

In the month of November, the elections for the Legislatures were to take place and the Swaraj Party was anxious to have a final and definite decision before the elections. Accordingly, it was decided to hold a special session of the Congress in September in Delhi. Maulana Mohammed Ali and Lala Lajpat Rai had by now been released also. The party in favour of 'no change' felt that both those leaders would support them but found instead that they were both in favour of a settlement. Lalaji was indisposed and was unable to take any active part in the discussions, but Maulana brought pressure to bear upon the 'no-changers' to induce them to come to some agreement with the Swaraj Party. To displease him meant displeasing the whole of Muslim India. Already in many parts of the country, Hindu-Muslim quarrels had begun. Rajaji was unable to attend this session because of ill health. The responsibility, therefore, fell upon Vallabhbhai, Rajendra Babu, Jamnalalji, and Gangadharrao Deshpande. All four were greatly concerned and their task was made no easier by the odd statement which Maulana Mohammed Ali made in the open session. "I have greater confidence," said Maulana Saheb, "in Mahatma Gandhi than in non-co-operation. Mahatmaji has by some spiritual trick—may be through telepathy—sent me the following directive: 'I do not insist that you should adhere to my programme. I am myself quite convinced of the wisdom of the whole of my programme, but if in view of the conditions in the country, you feel that it is desirable to cut out one or two details regarding the boycott, or to go slow in respect of any of them, or to introduce any new items, I would expect you, for the love of our country, to make such modifications as you consider desirable, and if necessary, even to adopt an entirely new scheme.'"

The delegates were surprised. It was against Gandhiji's principles to send messages of any kind from jail but there was nothing new in this message. The fact was that when



The Pride of Gujarat

Devdasbhai * had gone to meet Gandhiji in prison, in reply to a request for guidance, Gandhiji said :

"As a prisoner I cannot give any message to you. If others send me a message, I admonish them against it. To Maulana, I would only say this: 'I am very touched by your loyalty. But do not regard your loyalty to me as of first importance. Your objective should be loyalty towards the country. I have already indicated my views just before I was imprisoned and I still adhere to those views. But if you adopt a new policy, that would not in any way affect our mutual affection.'"

Without consulting Vallabhbhai, Mahadevbhai † and Devdas sent a telegram advising Rajaji of the situation and asked for a telegraphic reply. Before this reply could come, Vallabhbhai and his colleagues had come to the conclusion that it would be advisable not to oppose the Maulana ; but that Rajendra Babu and Vallabhbhai should clarify the stand of the 'no-changers' in the open Congress. Rajendra Babu spoke first and he said very feelingly :

"I am convinced that we are deviating from the principle of non-co-operation by going to the Legislatures, whatever be the motive. My shoulders are not big enough, however, to take the responsibility for creating a split in the Congress. Therefore, I will not oppose this resolution. I am sorry that I cannot support it. But the responsibility for proving that by going to the Legislatures you are not defeating the policy of non-co-operation, will rest upon Pandit Motilalji and Deshbandhu. I will go further and say that the responsibility for it will rest more than anyone else upon Maulana Mohammed Ali."

Just as Vallabhbhai rose to speak immediately after Rajendra Prasad, he was given Rajaji's telegraphic reply. On reading it, he appeared greatly relieved. As he stood up, one could see his eyes were moist and the fingers holding the telegram were shaking. In a voice full of sadness he said :

"We carried on this fight until now to the limit of our strength and ability and kept the flag of non-co-operation flying. We are, however, all soldiers. There is no leader among us but there is one person among us who has an acute brain and who thinks clearly. The message which he has sent from his sick-bed has just arrived. He says: 'I advise you to place the entire

* Gandhiji's youngest son, now Managing Editor, *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi.

† Gandhiji's famous Private Secretary, one of the ablest and closest of Gandhiji's lieutenants.

responsibility on Maulana Mohammed Ali. Do not do anything that does not please him. If he is very keen upon a settlement, well, accept it. I have a feeling that the country has to pass through bitter experiences. It is useless to discuss and to argue. There is no point in our preventing people from doing what they want. We have done what we could. We have lost many colleagues. We must not lose Maulana Mohammed Ali.' I accept this advice.

"I have thought a great deal and I see that I can help Maulana best by withdrawing my opposition. He says that I must consider the position of one who comes back after an absence of two years. He must have realized by now the difficulties of those who had remained outside during these two years. I know that by the stand I am now taking hundreds of young men will be disappointed. I am not sure that this resolution will not deal a death-blow to non-co-operation. Today, we look upon each other with suspicion and without love. This is an attempt to re-establish affection. It was a painful task during all this period to oppose great leaders of this country. At the same time it is equally difficult today to give up that opposition. Nevertheless, I request all those who are in favour of 'no change' that they should willingly accept our present position. I place the entire responsibility on Maulana Mohammed Ali. Jamnalalji and Gangadharrao Deshpande, who have been my colleagues in opposition, hold the same view as myself. If I may sum up our attitude in a sentence, we do neither support this resolution nor oppose it."

After his speech, Vallabhbhai left without waiting for the voting to take place. The whole of Gujarat was opposed to the compromise resolution but after Vallabhbhai's speech, virtually everyone from Gujarat remained neutral. Many delegates from other parts of the country also remained neutral, with the result that the resolution permitting Congressmen to stand for election to Legislatures, or to vote in such elections was passed with a large majority.

Thus, came to an end this great controversy and yet another important chapter in Vallabhbhai's career. Until the Congress at Gaya, Vallabhbhai had never spoken either at a Congress Session or in meetings of the All-India Congress Committees. At the Congress Session at Ahmedabad, he read his speech in Hindi as the Chairman of the Reception Committee. At the Congress in Gaya, for the first time he spoke in Hindi. Thereafter he spoke often in Hindi,

and although his Hindi was always full of Gujarati words and Gujarati expressions, neither Hindi nor Urdu speaking people had difficulty in understanding him.

Gujarat had been asked to contribute three hundred thousand rupees and to recruit 3,000 volunteers. To collect this sum from Gujarat was not a difficult task. But it was not so easy to enrol volunteers in an atmosphere which had already ceased to be exciting. In his absence Vallabhbhai was appointed member of a Committee by the Congress and its work kept him out of Gujarat for a few weeks — Indulal took charge of the work with great keenness and moved about from village to village. He was anxious to see that the total number of volunteers were recruited before the 30th of April but long before that date the Government arrested him because of a speech he had made. He was tried and sentenced to a year's imprisonment. Kakasaheb * too, who had been writing fiery articles in the *Navajivan* with a view to preparing the people for Civil Disobedience, was sentenced to a year's imprisonment. Nevertheless, Gujarat was able to collect for the Swaraj Fund not three hundred thousand rupees merely, but three hundred and twenty-five thousand rupees by the end of April; but it was able to recruit only 800 against the target of 3000 volunteers. After Indulal's imprisonment, the workers of Gujarat became impatient. On the 15th of April, Mahadevbhai, speaking as the President of the Bharuch District Conference voiced this in his speech :

> "If Hindu-Muslim unity is to be achieved, and if people are to be made conscious of their duties, and if constructive work is to be taken in hand with renewed vigour, there is only one way and that is by individuals sacrificing themselves."

Urging this he persuaded the Conference to pass a resolution to the effect that immediately after 30th of April, the Provincial Committee should be requested to offer individual Civil Disobedience.

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* Kakasaheb Kalelkar, a selfless educationist and close associate of Gandhiji. He has written a number of books in English, Gujarati and Marathi.

On his return when Vallabhbhai saw this resolution, he realized immediately the impatience of the workers, and wrote an article in which he said :

> "The programme at Gaya is the programme for Civil Disobedience. We have not had time to complete our preparations. To be in a hurry to start it before we are ready is suicidal. I realize that many who are constructive workers have also signed on as volunteers. They are anxious to go to jail but I am not ready to let a single person, who is engaged in constructive work, go to jail. The prison is for people like myself, or for those who have no confidence in constructive work; even then they should not court imprisonment until the Provincial Committee has given them permission."

Mahadevbhai, and other workers were not satisfied by this directive. Indeed, their dissatisfaction increased. Vallabhbhai tried to convince them by personal discussion and he followed up these discussions by another article in which he emphasized the need for calm thinking. He wrote :

> "Civil Disobedience would be useful only if our constructive work continued. We must continue our constructive work, and only if by some of us going to jail, we are able to increase the tempo of that work, could we regard Civil Disobedience as useful. It is a mistake to think that because we cannot do anything outside, we help matters by going to jail."

The fact of the matter was that Vallabhbhai did not think that individual Civil Disobedience would achieve the object of making the public bold and courageous. It could be trained far better only by mass Civil Disobedience directed towards achieving a definite though limited objective. That is why he turned his attention towards "the flag resistance struggle" which had started in Jabalpur and Nagpur. He pacified those who were keen on a fight by getting the Provincial Congress Committee to approve of their being sent in teams at the first opportunity to participate in it. As soon as Shri Jamnalal Bajaj, who was the leader of that struggle, was arrested, the Congress Working Committee laid the responsibility for further conducting it on Vallabhbhai.

CHAPTER XX

THE FLAG STRUGGLE

In August 1922, when the Enquiry Committee, appointed to enquire into the possibility of instituting Civil Disobedience, went to Jabalpur, the local Municipality presented an address to Hakim Ajmal Khan. On that occasion the National Flag was flown over the Municipal Hall. Ordinarily, this would not have caused a stir. But the Municipality's decision to fly the National Flag followed a decision to throw out two other resolutions which had been tabled, viz., to fly the Union Jack alone, and alternatively, to fly the Union Jack side by side with the National Flag. Further, a member of the Parliament asked a question whether this act of the Municipality did not constitute an insult to the Union Jack and if so what steps were proposed to be taken. The Secretary of State for India on behalf of the Government said in reply that instructions would be issued to ensure that this would not happen in the future.

In March 1923, Rajaji and others went to Jabalpur to attend a meeting of the Congress Working Committee. A resolution similar to the previous one was passed by the Municipality but this time the District Magistrate was on the watch and disallowed the resolution. To put the matter beyond any shadow of doubt, he passed an order under Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code, prohibiting the flying of the National Flag on the Municipal Building and the holding of a meeting in front of the Town Hall.

On March the 18th, on the Anniversary of Gandhiji's imprisonment, under the leadership of Pandit Sunderlal, a large procession was taken out with the National Flag. Pandit Sunderlal and ten others were arrested and the National Flag was taken away from them. On the following day they were all released. They asked for the return of the National Flag but were told that it was confiscated and would not be returned. Pandit Sunderlal objected saying

that this constituted an insult to the National Flag and warned the authorities that it would lead to a tremendous agitation. Panditji was arrested and sentenced to six months' imprisonment.

On the 13th of April, a procession was taken out in Nagpur with the National Flag. It had been announced beforehand that the procession would go through the Civil Lines into Sadar Bazaar, where a meeting was to be held. The District Magistrate and the Superintendent of Police stationed themselves with a large police force at the post near the District Court whence the Civil Lines area began. They stopped the procession and when the volunteers announced their determination to go forward, the police attacked them. The volunteers were beaten with the flag-staff itself ; some of them were dragged along the road and flung into the open drains. A passer-by, who was not a non-co-operator, seeing the pitiful condition in which the wounded volunteers were left, carried them in his car to the hospital, and subsequently wrote to the newspapers, giving an eyewitness description of the cruel and inhuman conduct of the police.

The Working Committee of the Nagpur District Committee resolved that the people had the right to take out peacefully the National Flag on any public road and since the Government chose to interfere with that right, the public must resist it in an organized manner from the 1st of May. It was decided further that instead of dividing their efforts between Jabalpur and Nagpur, the movement should be concentrated in Nagpur. From the 1st of May until the 18th of August, every day except on weekly holidays or other days specially declared as holidays, volunteers went to the prohibited spot and were regularly arrested. On the 18th August, a procession was taken out and passed through all the prohibited areas without any interference. The Congress had won. The volunteers were drawn from all classes and included well-to-do merchants, agriculturists, lawyers, doctors and teachers. In all 1748 suffered imprisonment during this conflict. A young man from Bihar, 22 years of age, died in jali, and practically

everyone who came out of jail was much the worse in health because of harsh treatment.

The principle at issue was very clear : the right to carry the National Flag or indeed any political or religious flag peacefully on a public street whether in a large or in a small organized procession. This is a right which has been recognized in every civilized country. While the Nagpur conflict was still in progress, in England, for instance, members of the Bolshevik Party went in procession with the red flag, shouting Bolshevik slogans in front of the Houses of Parliament, and no action was taken against them. Indeed in India, too, in all other Provinces, processions carrying the National Flag were allowed to move about freely without hindrance. In Nagpur also, the local Government had no objection to a National Flag procession anywhere in the city except in the Civil Lines. The Civil Lines was an area in which were located the houses of European officers and of the more westernized Indians. The total number of Europeans including women and children living there hardly exceeded 200, but it was clear from the Government statement that the Government was anxious not to offend them.

> "The Local Government has not interfered, and does not propose to interfere, with the use of the 'Swarajya' flag except when it constitutes an offence against the criminal law. When it is proposed to fly the 'Swarajya' flag or take it in procession in such circumstances as is likely to cause a breach of the public tranquillity or cause annoyance to any person lawfully employed, the District authorities will take action under the law to prevent breach of the peace or annoyance. It is undoubtedly the case that any form of disrespect to the Union Jack, the national flag of the British Empire, is deeply resented by some classes of loyal subjects of that Empire."

In this statement there were two mis-statements. It was surely incorrect to imply that it was only in the Civil Lines that loyal people lived whose feelings were hurt by the sight of the National Flag. It was even more absurd to maintain that a procession carrying the National Flag constituted an insult to the Union Jack. When the early processions were dispersed by physical violence, no one in the procession had uttered a word or a slogan which could

be regarded as insulting to the Union Jack. And even if it were correct that a National Flag procession was an insult to the Union Jack, why should it be so only when taken out through the Civil Lines ? In the City many such processions had, in the past, been taken out and on many buildings in the City the National Flag was regularly flown. In view of this, the absurdity of the following sentence in the Government's statement was patent : "The Jabalpur Cantonment contains a large number of European troops and residents and, had the procession been permitted to proceed, there would undoubtedly have been a risk of a breach of the peace." If this sentence means anything at all, it means that the British people residing in this country would be so annoyed by the very sight of the National Flag being carried through their residential area that they would resort to physical violence ; and if they did, the Government which had no hesitation in imprisoning hundreds of people for carrying their flag along public highways, could not similarly imprison a few British who wished to prevent others from doing that which the law permitted them to do.

There is yet another point in the local Government's statement which deserves notice. The opening words of the statement were : "The local Government has not interfered, and does not propose to interfere, with the use of the 'Swarajya' flag except when it constitutes an offence against the criminal law." But further on in the statement occur the words : "Moreover, where the circumstances are such as to indicate that a Municipal Committee or other local body has resolved to hoist the 'Swarajya' flag over its building, the Government is not prepared to tolerate such action. In such circumstances, the resolution of the local body will be rescinded and, if in spite of such prohibition the local body persists the Government will mark its disapproval by withdrawing its grants to such local body or taking such other disciplinary measures as it thinks necessary." This statement of the Government makes it abundantly clear that the Civil Disobedience offered by the Congress on the issue of the National Flag at Nagpur was nothing more than an attempt on the part of the people to

establish a fundamental right of all self-respecting citizens. The determined attempt to crush this movement proved not merely that the issue was one of cardinal importance to the nationalist movement but also that a section of British officers clearly understood its significance.

This was a conflict after Vallabhbhai's heart. The issue was unambiguous. At his instance, the Gujarat Congress Committee decided to keep a group of volunteers in readiness for despatch to Nagpur. Kheda District alone immediately prepared a team of 75 volunteers under the leadership of Mohanlal Pandya; other districts in Gujarat also took up the work. Action on similar lines was started in Tamil Nad and Bihar. On the 25th May, the All-India Congress Committee met in Bombay and passed a resolution congratulating the volunteers of the Central Provinces on the Satyagraha they had commenced at Nagpur in defence of the National Flag, and advised the rest of the country to keep volunteers ready to be sent to Nagpur as soon as they were required. Immediately after the meeting of the Committee, Rajaji, Vallabhbhai and some other workers went to Nagpur to study the progress of the conflict on the spot.

Meantime the Government was not inactive. It opened its propaganda barrage. The Commissioner of Nagpur, whose house was in the Civil Lines, was the acknowledged leader of the British officers. He appeared to have developed almost a pathological dislike of the National Flag. Had the procession been permitted to go through the Civil Lines, it would inevitably have passed by his bungalow, and he publicly announced more than once that if the procession ever came anywhere near his bungalow, he would fire upon it. The Government of the Central Provinces seemed to be in mortal terror of this officer, who was the Secretary of the Indian Civil Service Association, an Association which it was popularly believed was powerful enough to contrive the dismissal of Governors and Viceroys, if it so desired. Moreover, this Commissioner was in charge of publicity in connection with this conflict. He wrote to *The Times of India*, Bombay, and to the *Statesman* of Calcutta as their

Correspondent. The theme of his article in *The Times of India* was: 'This conflict is entirely a put-up show. Its object is to harass the Europeans and somehow or other to create disturbances. These people are evidently desirous of flying their National Flag on the Government House and on the Secretariat. Such irresponsible mischief-mongers clearly must be arrested and sent to jail; indeed, if they are not dealt with firmly now, lawful administration will cease to exist.' In some of his articles he also put forward the suggestion that if the loyal public was to be protected, such scoundrels should be shot out of hand, and went on to say that just as the Muslims were enraged when bands were played in front of their mosques, British feelings were hurt when the National Flag was taken out in procession through areas in which the British resided or worked.

As if not to be outdone, the Deputy Commissioners of several districts also made astonishingly perverse and malicious statements. Thus, for instance, the Deputy Commissioner of Seoni told the people in his district to beware of attempts to persuade them to go to Nagpur. He warned them that if they went they would definitely be arrested. They were being told that they must make a sacrifice for the honour of their National Flag. But was this the national flag of India? Certainly not. No one had ever heard of such a flag till two or three years ago, when some bright ones of the Congress designed this flag for the first time. The Congress's only desire was to get innocent people to go to jail, and then make it appear from these imprisonments that the Government was tyrannical. The Congress leaders themselves went into hiding in Nagpur. They enjoyed themselves at home and slept in peace, while they drove ignorant villagers like goats and sheep to jail. What was to be gained by taking out a flag in procession and getting arrested in the bargain? If they were fined, neither the Congress nor its leaders would pay the fine for them, and if they were sentenced to jail, their cultivation would suffer; the leaders were not going to look after their lands, or their families. They must know that only the sons of simple peasants were going to jail. Why did not sons of

merchants, lawyers and other educated men participate in these processions? Evidently because, being educated, they knew that all this was foolishness. It was only poor, ignorant and simple people like them who allowed themselves to be thus entangled.

The statement issued by the Deputy Commissioner of Narsingpur District was even worse:

> "Some months ago a few people calling themselves non-co-operators designed a flag and now they are forcing everyone to call it the National Flag. But while it is only this small gang which believes it to be the National Flag, others know that it is not and cannot be such.
>
> "The Government does not interfere with people for going about with any flag or for flying any flag on their houses. But of late some people in the name of non-violence have tried to take a so-called national flag in procession through the Civil Lines where Government officials live and where their club is located, solely in order to harass the British. This is not different from the way in which at times some Hindus with a view to creating trouble play music in front of Muslim mosques. Such mischievous actions can only lead to disturbances and it is a matter for great surprise that all this incitement to violence is being organized by these agitators in the name of non-violence, independence and self-government. Such actions have always been regarded by the Government as improper and, therefore, to be prohibited. That is why the Government has forbidden the taking out of flag processions through the Civil Lines, although people are at liberty to carry the flag through any other part of the city. And now these so-called leaders of the people are persuading others to fight and create disturbances while they themselves sit back and watch the fun. From Narsingpur District alone 20 to 35 villagers have been induced to go to Nagpur, where they were all arrested and sentenced to imprisonment and fined; their properties were also being auctioned. Let everyone beware and avoid getting into such difficulties. Action will be taken under the law against those who break the law, but those who remain within the law will continue as before, free and unmolested. The Government is very strong, but is also merciful to the people. It has always the welfare of the public at heart and is planning to grant independence in due course. To fight against such a Government is futile. But those foolish people who in spite of all this choose to fight will reap the consequences."

The Congress was, for its part, determined to carry on the struggle till a definite result was secured. The first

party of volunteers from Gujarat left Surat on the 11th of June to take part in a special demonstration which Jamnalal Bajaj * had decided upon for the 18th of June, the day on which Gandhiji was imprisoned. All the Provincial Congress Committees had been invited to send their quota of volunteers so that the whole country might claim to have participated in the sacrifice. In response to that invitation, a party came from Karnatak under the leadership of Dr. Hardikar and another from Tamil Nad under Shri Varadachari. From amongst the party from Gujarat, fifteen were arrested when offering Satyagraha on the 15th June. Each of them was sentenced to six months' rigorous imprisonment plus a month's simple imprisonment.

The order issued by the District Magistrate of Nagpur on the 1st of May was to remain in force for a period of two months; nevertheless, on the 17th of June, another order was issued, also effective for two months, prohibiting the taking out of the National Flag through the city of Nagpur. This order was presumably designed to prevent any big effort on the 18th of June, the anniversary of Gandhiji's imprisonment. On the evening of the 17th the leaders were arrested, and the 250 odd volunteers who were in the camp were arrested early on the morning of the 18th. Vinoba Bhave was among them. Section 109 of the Criminal Procedure Code was applied. This Section entitled the authorities to take action against anyone who had no ostensible means of livelihood, and who was suspected of being a vagrant or an undesirable character. Among these volunteers there were lawyers practising in High Courts, there were people who were double graduates of Universities, there were learned teachers, respectable Zamindars and reputed businessmen. Such were the people, however, on whom this Section was enforced. It is possible that the Government was influenced by the consideration, that if in the future it was called upon to show the number of those who had offered Satyagraha and were punished for

* A rich businessman, staunch Congressman, Treasurer of the Congress for a number of years, and a close associate of Gandhiji.

that reason, it would technically be justified in excluding those to whom Section 109 of the Criminal Procedure Code had been applied and thus be able to show a smaller number as having taken part in this Satyagraha.

In spite of mass arrests, the flow of Flag Volunteers continued unabated. As they arrived in Nagpur, whether from a district in the Central Provinces or from other provinces, they were arrested under Section 109. The Government thought it necessary to issue a statement on the 28th of June explaining its reasons. In this Jamnalalji was described as Seth Jamnalal Bajaj, a rich Marwadi of Wardha and a devout follower of Gandhi, almost as if that was an offence. Extracts from his speeches taken out of their context were given to show that he had committed the offence of replying to the Government's policy statements. He was also said to have addressed in a Marathi paper called *Tarun Maharashtra*, the following appeal: "When the Nagpur conflict is over, volunteers will have to turn their attention to the other injustices of the Government. The main objective of Satyagraha is to remove all obstacles in the path of the achievement of independence." It was mentioned in the statement that the National Flag was being used as an instrument for inciting people to violence and to commit breaches of the law. The statement concluded: "The true meaning of Satyagraha is to be firm in the interests of truth; but in Nagpur, it has become, in the hands of ignorant people who had been misled, an instrument for encouraging lawlessness. Hundreds of poor and ignorant people have been roped in either by bribery or by other means." And yet if the list of volunteers whether from the Central Provinces or from other provinces had been carefully scrutinized, it would have been apparent immediately to any impartial person that not one of them was capable of being described as ignorant or open to bribery or coercion.

On the 3rd of July, a team of 45 volunteers from the Bharuch District arrived under the leadership of Dr. Chandubhai Desai. It would be incorrect to say that they arrived in Nagpur, as their train was stopped at a small

station called Ajani which is close to the Nagpur Jail, a few miles outside Nagpur City. The police officer informed Dr. Chandubhai that he and his party were being arrested under Section 109 of the Criminal Procedure Code. They were taken through pelting rain on foot to the Nagpur Jail. Two other parties, which came later from Ahmedabad, were similarly arrested at the Nagpur station. Volunteers now followed in rapid succession from different provinces: Bihar, Sind, Maharashtra, Punjab, Bengal, Karnatak, United Provinces and Hyderabad. And even as they came they were arrested. In the Central Provinces itself, railway tickets were not issued to anyone who was proceeding to Nagpur with a view to taking part in the movement. And in order that Satyagrahis might not make their way to Nagpur on foot, police posts were located on all roads leading to Nagpur. One party of 7 from Ahmedabad and another of 48 from Gujarat came on foot and were immediately arrested. On one occasion a person was arrested just because he was carrying a flag. The Magistrate found it difficult to decide upon the Section under which he could be punished. He finally decided to define procession to be two men walking together, or one following the other, provided one of them carried a flag in his hand.

Political workers who were imprisoned in 1930-'32 and in 1942 would find it difficult to imagine the conditions in Nagpur Jail at this time. The prisoners were divided into groups, according to their capacity for work ; into the first category were put those who could do relatively very hard work, and similarly according to their physical capacity others were placed in lower categories. Ravishankar Vyas * *alias* Maharaj was placed in category 1, and was given every day 25 seers of grain to grind. Those in the second category were given 15 seers. The 3rd category obtained lighter work. Another task which used to be allotted was stone-crushing or breaking. The prisoners were given at one meal Jawar bread and *dal*, and at the other Jawar bread and

* A valiant political and social worker of Gujarat, his entire life being devoted to public work.

some vegetables. The *dal* used to be so watery that it was easier to find bits of dirt in it than a grain of the pulse, while the vegetable was always of the poorest quality. The *chapatis* or bread were rarely fully baked, and invariably contained bits of stone. The greatest hardship of all was caused to the prisoners by the extraordinary toilet arrangements. There was a row of latrines without doors ; everyone was required to be out in five minutes ; as if that was not bad enough, warders would shout to occupants to get out after barely three minutes had passed. In order to compel prisoners to ask for forgiveness, the warders ill-treated, harassed, humiliated and threatened them. The Medical Officer of the jail was merciless, and whatever the illness he gave the same medicine ; and his only remedy for any complaint was : "apologize and get out of prison." If a prisoner failed to complete his quota of work, he was invariably punished ; and it was always easy in jail to prove an offence against a prisoner. The punishments were harsh — dark rooms, solitary confinement etc.

When the Nagpur Jail was filled to capacity, prisoners were sent to Akola Jail. The conditions there were, if anything, a little worse. Roughly 1,750 volunteers offered resistance during the 110 days of the struggle. Of these, some 200 offered apologies when they found it impossible to endure the hardships of the prison.

Immediately after Jamnalalji's arrest, a meeting of the All-India Congress Committee was convened at Nagpur. The controversy between the 'no-changers' and the Swaraj Party was then at its worst. The leaders of both the groups attended this meeting. The 'no-changers' proposed that every assistance should be given to the Flag struggle. On the very day that the Committee met, Jamnalalji's trial was over, but the Magistrate had reserved his order. The general feeling was that if the Swaraj Party opposed this proposal, the Government would be encouraged to deal even more severely with the movement, but if instead, that party supported the resolution, Jamnalalji would be let off with a light sentence. The Swaraj Party, however, decided to oppose, and expressed

the view that the Flag Satyagraha was entirely misconceived. The same day Jamnalalji was sentenced to virtually two years' rigorous imprisonment.

On the following day, the Working Committee of the Congress met and entrusted Vallabhbhai with the further conduct of the struggle in Nagpur. In compliance with the Working Committee's resolution, Vallabhbhai proceeded to Nagpur, where he arrived on the 22nd of July. Jamnalalji's wife, Janaki Devi, arranged for Vallabhbhai to stay in Dhantoli, a suburb of Nagpur. With Jamnalalji and practically all the local workers in prison, and the police in possession of the volunteers' camp, Vallabhbhai found himself without any organized assistance. Nagpur, moreover, was a stronghold of the Swaraj Party. That was one of the reasons why people from other parts of India had to come for conducting this struggle.

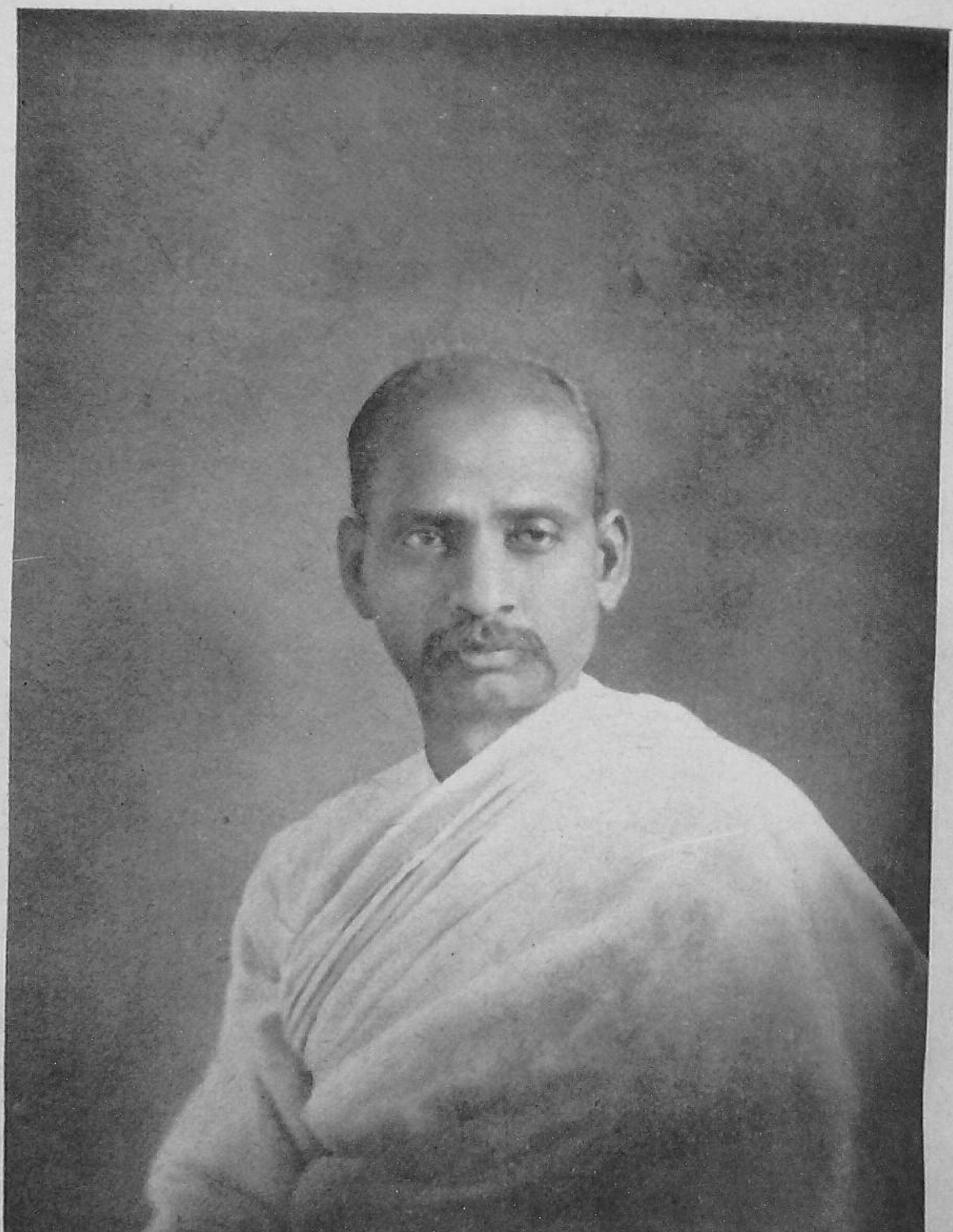
After arriving in Nagpur Vallabhbhai made a careful examination on the spot of all the facts affecting the campaign. In a letter which he wrote he said :

> "I have informed all the provinces of the number of volunteers they must send and the dates on which they must arrive. Volunteers should, accordingly, continue coming every day so that at least 50 would be available for arrest at the station. After four or five days, we shall make such changes in this programme as may be necessary."

A few days later Vithalbhai arrived in Nagpur. The Nagpur Legislature was about to meet and his intention in coming to Nagpur was to secure the assistance, for this campaign, of his colleagues of the Swaraj Party.

In a letter written at this time Vallabhbhai said :

> "This is indeed a stimulating struggle. If only the people are united, it would be possible to make the Government yield within a week. But here we have an orchestra in which every player plays whatever tune he likes. All the English newspapers are either opposed to the struggle or are indifferent. The public men seem interested only in getting their own point of view accepted. The Government of the day is very determined. In spite of these difficulties, we have to see that the attention of everyone in the country is focussed on Nagpur. The Government have already discovered that the fight is far from over. Workers have started coming in accordance with my programme. On the 3rd there is



Leader of Nagpur and Borsad Satyagraha

a meeting of the Executive Council of the C. P. Government and on the 6th the Legislature meets. The Flag question is bound to be considered in the Legislature, but that will not lead to a solution. It will only give the Government an opportunity to express itself strongly against us. But it might enable us to discover the Government's intentions.

"In the next issue or two of *Young India*, you must appeal for money. The appeal should be well drafted. Keep on asking also for more volunteers. It does not look as if they are likely to arrest me in the near future. When I first arrived, they had no good reason for arresting me; now that the movement is regaining strength, they might reconsider the matter, but I doubt if they will do anything until after the Legislature adjourns.

"Let Devadas not be wholly tied to his work of the Press. Let him move about a little; he does not yet know Gujarat well and Gujarat must also come to know him.

"I hope you and Devdas will be able to find time to look up my children; they should not feel desolate. I cannot understand why Manibehn wept. This is not the time to weep. She has plenty of courage. After giving advice to people in C. P. to go to jail, how can we cry?

"Please tell Ba † to be ready to go to jail. If it is possible, issue an appeal over Ba's signature to the women of Gujarat to come forward to join her, when she leaves for Nagpur on the 18th. The present order expires on the 17th. If the Government extends it, women also must take part in the movement from the 18th; that cannot fail to arouse the country. We must proceed on the assumption that the Government will prolong the order. If it does not, how can they continue to keep the volunteers imprisoned?

"Remember me to everyone in the Ashram. Give my *pranam* ‡ to Ba."

At a meeting of welcome to released prisoners about that time in Nagpur, some released prisoners, embittered by the harsh treatment meted out to them in prison, made angry speeches. Vallabhbhai, who was present, mainly to see that there was no unseemly demonstration, took the opportunity to explain both to the ex-prisoners and to the general public at the meeting the principles underlying the Flag Satyagraha. He said:

† Kasturba Gandhi, Gandhiji's wife.

‡ Respectful salutation.

"We have had today a first-hand account of the hardships which our brothers have had to endure in jail. They are naturally very angry, and it is understandable that they should have described in a somewhat emotional way the hardships and the inhuman treatment they have had to undergo in jail. But we should be careful not to exaggerate. Besides, instead of concerning ourselves with what Government servants should have done or should not have done, let us think of what we have failed to do. Before looking at their faults, let us look at ours. It is our duty to fit ourselves for discharging what we consider to be right. My advice to those who have come out of jail is that they should teach our people the twin lessons of love and of duty. That should be their main task. May God give you strength to fight many more such battles in the interests of truth and duty."

The Provincial Legislature met in the beginning of August. In his inaugural address, the Governor said:

"This defiance of the law is supported by those who oppose all co-operation with the Government and the movement is now kept alive by 'volunteers' from other provinces of India.....So far as I know, there is not a single civilized country in which such an unrestricted right is permitted. The law in India regulating processions is clear. The District Magistrate of Nagpur has not forbidden all processions within the prohibited area, but processions without his permission, in order to secure that they do not cause annoyance to any section of the public and are properly regulated. It is a matter of regret to the Government that this agitation should result in the imprisonment of numbers of misguided persons, but there is no alternative to punishment for organized defiance of the law. The Local Government regards this agitation as clearly Civil Disobedience — an attempt to overcome the authority of the Government, and is determined that this challenge to lawful authority, this defiance of the law, should be resisted with all the resources at its command. In this policy, it confidently hopes for the support of all law-abiding citizens, including the members of this Council."

In spite of the Governor's advice, thanks to Vithalbhai's efforts, resolutions were moved in the Legislature suggesting: (1) That all the pending cases arising out of the Flag Satyagraha should be withdrawn and that railway tickets to Nagpur should be freely issued; (ii) that the order under Section 144 prohibiting the taking out of Flag Processions in Nagpur should be immediately withdrawn; and (iii) that all those arrested or imprisoned in connection with the Flag Struggle should be unconditionally released.

In replying to the debate on these resolutions, the Home Member stated that no one had any objection to the National Flag but it was the duty of every Government to frame rules for the taking out of processions. If permission for taking out such processions were asked in accordance with those rules such permission would be given. He added further that the order prohibiting processions was due to expire on the 17th. If in the meantime there was no disturbance or breach of law and order, according to the law that order could not be further extended. The resolutions were nevertheless passed by a majority — 31 for and 27 against. His Excellency the Governor, however, disallowed these resolutions, under his special powers, on the ground that although the resolutions had been passed by a majority, they could not be implemented so long as the Non-co-operation Movement was not called off. The failure of these efforts of Vithalbhai caused considerable disappointment to advocates of council entry.

In spite of thus overriding the wishes of the Legislature, the Government realized that the struggle was gathering momentum, and decided to make an effort to reach some settlement. The Home Member arranged a meeting on the 13th between the Governor, Vallabhbhai and Vithalbhai. Both sides restated their respective points of view but could get no nearer. It seemed as if the Government would proceed to promulgate a new order as soon as the existing order prohibiting processions expired. If that happened, it seemed also certain that Vallabhbhai would be among the first to be arrested.

Meantime, Vallabhbhai felt that before a new order was issued, effort should be made to remove whatever misconceptions Government's propaganda and speeches in the Legislature had caused regarding the struggle. He accordingly issued the following statement on the 16th :

"The prohibitory order expires tomorrow, the 17th. Instead of a batch of three volunteers as usual, a procession of five volunteers will start for Sadar Bazar, through the Civil Lines on the 17th. The route, time and instructions for the processionists are indicated in the notice issued to them. If they are prevented by the authorities, the struggle will assume a new phase. I ask

the public not to be impatient but to wait and watch. In the meantime and under the authority vested in me by the Working Committee of the Congress, I desire to make the position of the Congress clear as against some misunderstandings and misrepresentations in certain quarters including the Government.

"We (non-co-operators) have been accused by no less a person than His Excellency the Governor of the Central Provinces that we claim an absolutely unrestricted right unheard of in any civilized country to use public thoroughfares for processions. I have been instructed by the Working Committee to state that that is not the case. No one for a moment denies the need for *bona fide* regulations of traffic and processions, but I desire to make it clear that the Nagpur Satyagraha struggle has been started in order to vindicate our elementary right against arbitrary and unjustifiable interferences and abuse of law. The Working Committee of the Congress has further asked me to make it clear that the organizers of the processions never intend to cause annoyance to any section of the public. This fact has been made clear by several responsible persons in their speeches and writings as also in the very first bulletin printed, published and distributed broadcast by the Nagpur Flag Satyagraha Committee in the month of April, before the actual commencement of Satyagraha. The Working Committee has also instructed me to repudiate most emphatically the suggestion contained in the speech of the Home Member of the C. P. Government that the National Flag processions were being organized to offer an insult to the Union Jack."

This statement put the Government in a dilemma. If they failed to issue an order continuing the prohibition, it would constitute admission of defeat. On the other hand, if they decided to issue a fresh order, the struggle would continue with redoubled strength and the responsibility would fall squarely on the Government. That very evening, the Home Member met Vallabhbhai and discussed the possibility of a settlement. He suggested that if the procession of the 18th was allowed to pass through the Civil Lines, the struggle should be called off. This was acceptable to Vallabhbhai provided the Government were agreeable to releasing all those who had been arrested and imprisoned in the course of this struggle. The Home Member accepted this condition and after obtaining the consent of the Governor, confirmed the arrangement in writing. After this was settled, the Home Member expressed a desire to meet Vithalbhai. But

Vithalbhai was just then leaving for Bombay by the mail train. So the Home Member met him at the station and informed him of the settlement. It was understood that until the conditions had been fully carried out by both sides, no announcement of any kind would be made in the newspapers. Vallabhbhai immediately sent out telegrams stopping Kasturba and fresh volunteers from coming to Nagpur.

Although in accordance with the agreement, the original order was not renewed, the Police Superintendent issued a notice under the Police Act directing that no one should take out a procession through the Civil Lines without his permission. Vallabhbhai was surprised at this, and thought that perhaps the Government had changed its mind. Vallabhbhai decided, however, that the Superintendent of the Police should be given prior information of his intention to take out a procession through the Civil Lines on the 18th. Accordingly, he wrote to the District Superintendent of Police, Nagpur, stating that he proposed to take out a procession on the 18th of August 1923, through the City and the Civil Lines, at the time and along the route indicated in the printed leaflet which had already been circulated. He enclosed a copy of this leaflet for his information.

One hundred volunteers set out at 12 o'clock with the National Flag. At regular intervals, they shouted solemnly 'Mahatmaji ki jai' and other national slogans. Near the Railway Bridge, which had come to be called as a result of this struggle, the Flag Bridge, there stood, as usual, a company of police, but the procession was allowed to pass on to the National Flag Square where previously many a volunteer had been beaten. There, too, was stationed a police force. Throughout the Police Superintendent with mounted police, accompanied the procession. The police had been stationed on both sides of the road and between them the procession, shouting national slogans, marched along the route indicated in the leaflet and reached Sadar Bazar. When it passed the church, volunteers observed silence and marched

with solemnity. The procession dispersed in the Sadar Bazar.

In the evening Vallabhbhai spoke very briefly as he was not feeling too fit, and said :

> " The honour of the National Flag thus stands vindicated and our right to take out processions on public roads, in a peaceful and orderly manner, has been restored. This I regard as a triumph of truth, non-violence and suffering. By the grace of God, I am, therefore, now in a position to announce that the Nagpur Satyagraha campaign successfully closes on this auspicious Gandhi day in a manner entirely in consonance with the spirit of the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi."

He went on to congratulate the brave men and women who had for the sake of the country and the National Flag suffered all manner of hardships, who were still suffering and were determined to suffer if the struggle continued. He thanked also all those who had assisted directly or indirectly in the organization of the struggle and in bringing it to a successful conclusion.

But the victory did not mean that Vallabhbhai's troubles had ended. Indeed, they began in earnest now. The police felt that they had to vindicate their position, and contended that there was no question of a victory ; the procession was according to them allowed to go through the Civil Lines with their permission and in accordance with arrangements approved by them. The Commissioner of Nagpur and the Deputy Commissioners of Districts, who were all European I.C.S. officers, read in Vallabhbhai's speech a personal insult, and they raised so much opposition against the Provincial Government that the Government of India had to intervene between the Provincial Government and the I.C.S. officers. The Anglo-Indian newspapers also attacked the Provincial Government. They found it difficult to reconcile the speech made by the Governor in the Legislature with his readiness to meet the representatives of the Congress Working Committee. The Provincial Government, in their opinion, would be creating an awkward situation if it were to release all those who had taken part in a movement which was openly revolutionary, and who had been sentenced to imprisonment after proper legal

trial. The non-co-operators would thereby be greatly encouraged and law-abiding people would be very much disheartened. They had a right to expect the Government to adhere to its promises to maintain law and order in the country and to administer justice.

After the announcement of the successful conclusion of the struggle, the country was looking forward to the release of some 2,000 Satyagrahis who were in the different prisons of the Central Provinces. The people of Nagpur began assembling at the jail gates of the city. Preparations were afoot in the city for welcoming the prisoners. The Home Member had told Vallabhbhai that it would be two or three days before the prisoners could be released because the permission of the Government of India had to be obtained. On the 21st, the Home Member brought a letter from the Governor in which he blamed Vallabhbhai for the situation created by a speech Vithalbhai had made in Bombay, in which it was asserted that a victory had been won by the people and that the prisoners would be released in a few days. It had enraged the Commissioner of Nagpur and at his instigation, the whole group of Civilian Officers had risen unanimously against the Government of the Central Provinces and opposed the release of the prisoners. Vallabhbhai repudiated this and pointed out that Vithalbhai had no connection with the struggle; he had come to Nagpur as a leader of the Swaraj Party. Moreover, it was the Home Member himself who was responsible for informing Vithalbhai of the agreement reached by him with the Government. Further, that the Government must accept responsibility for the long article which had appeared in *The Times of India* claiming that Satyagrahis had surrendered unconditionally, that they had taken out a procession secretly after obtaining permission from the police, and that there had been a complete vindication of the Government's policy. Both the Governor and the Home Member were somewhat taken aback by Vallabhbhai's very resolute attitude. They began pressing the Government of India for authority to release the prisoners. The Civilian Officers, on the other side, represented their point of view

to the Secretary of State for India in London. A week went in this quarrel. The delay in the release of the prisoners led the Indian newspapers to attack Vallabhbhai. They charged him with having asked for an interview with the Governor, with negotiating with the Governor, and finally for asking permission from the Police Superintendent to take out a procession and giving up the very point for which the struggle had been conducted and so many people had suffered hardships. In other words, it was suggested that Vallabhbhai had lowered the prestige of the Congress by his compromise on a point of principle. Many leaders of the Swaraj Party, too, started criticizing him in this manner.

A private letter to Mahadevbhai which he wrote on the 1st of September, indicates what Vallabhbhai felt and how he managed to maintain his balance of mind in the midst of this storm. He said :

> "I am in a big fix. It is not easy for one who had not taken part in the struggle to understand the significance of our victory. I have sealed my lips. The Government is opposed to any pronouncement being made. I am sending a copy of the *Pioneer* to you. Complaints about the leading article in *The Times* are heard on your side, but it is all untrue. Only when the right time comes, will it be possible to publish the true story. Unfortunately, our people are very impatient and have no faith. After I had issued my statement announcing the end of the struggle it was for the Government to express its views, and they have not chosen to do so. You will see how angry the *Pioneer* is. I feel that Vithalbhai has been indiscreet. What he said has caused a terrific commotion in the Civil Service.
>
> "I have got the Commissioner here in a tight corner. Many Civil Service Officers are of his way of thinking. They feel that the settlement means complete defeat of the Government and so they appear to have opposed the release of the prisoners. The matter, however, is now in the hands of the Government of India. I would very much like to recount the various stages of this struggle. Although *Kesari* and *Maratha* have overwhelmed me with abuses, I have refused to reply. So long as the prisoners are not released, I shall not speak. How long that will take, it is difficult to say. We have now to see what the Government of India decide to do. If they do not release the prisoners, the local Government's prestige and honour will be damaged, and if they are released, the Civilians will be enraged. I am writing all this for your private information ; none of it is meant for publication.

"When I come there I will tell you how we achieved our victory. Our victory is not contingent upon the release of the prisoners. On the contrary, it lies in the fact that the procession with the National Flag went through the Civil Lines. It does not worry me even if not a single prisoner is released. The Government will have broken its word and I have enough evidence to prove that. I am waiting for its final decision.

"I am surprised that there are people in Gujarat who still believe that it is because of efforts in the Legislature that prisoners will be released. The fact is that if there had been no Legislature, this matter would have been settled much earlier. But please do not say anything to anybody until I come there. Nothing should appear in the newspapers, otherwise things might go wrong once again. Had Vithalbhai not been indiscreet in Bombay, I might well have left here on the 22nd along with the released prisoners.

"The Correspondent of *The Times of India* has suggested that I had applied to the Police Superintendent for permission. He has been caught out. I have been able to bring to light his secret conspiracy. It was he who had instigated the *Pioneer* to write against the Government and caused the delay in the release of prisoners. The Government for the moment is completely baffled. It must, however, come to some decision in the next few days although, of course, it is difficult to say what will happen if there is a conflict between the Government of India and the Government of the Central Provinces. Therefore, it is that I request all of you to have patience."

Meantime, the people throughout the country were becoming more and more restive. Many felt that Vallabhbhai had been tricked. Vallabhbhai, as was usual with him, waited patiently, but when he felt he had been patient long enough, formally warned the Government of the Central Provinces that if the prisoners were not released within 24 hours, he would be forced to publish the whole of the correspondence that had been exchanged between him and the Governor. He would be compelled to resume the Satyagraha struggle, and since this would have been made necessary because the Government had gone back upon its word, the responsibility for whatever followed would be laid at the doors of the Government. This warning galvanized the Governor and the Home Member into action. They, in their turn, informed the Secretary of State that if the prisoners were not immediately released, it

would be necessary for both of them to hand in their resignations. Orders were received before the twentyfour hours were over. They coincided with the departure of the obdurate Commissioner of Nagpur on long leave preparatory to retirement.

On September the 3rd, all the Satyagrahi prisoners were released. They marched in a procession through the Civil Lines carrying aloft the National Flag. In the evening, at a public meeting Vallabhbhai paid a tribute to the genuine desire of the Government of the Central Provinces to bring the whole episode to a satisfactory conclusion. After explaining how this Satyagraha campaign had been conducted he said :

> "Immediately after the procession passed through the prohibited area and the announcement of the success of the movement was made, the whole country and particularly the Anglo-Indian Press was flooded with all sorts of mischievous, misleading and inaccurate reports, and the controversy about our interview with His Excellency the Governor of the Central Provinces was also raised in the Press. To me, how the interview was brought about is of little consequence. The general impression that the non-co-operators stand on ceremonies, is unfounded. Personally I would not even wait for a formal invitation, if I felt assured of a genuine desire for mutual understanding. But I stand here today to contradict publicly in no uncertain terms all reports and rumours about the compromise or agreement. There is no truth in such reports. We have made no compromise or agreement with the Government nor have we given any undertakings. The interview took place on the 13th August. It only afforded us an opportunity of placing each other's points of view."

In regard to the allegation that he sought permission for the procession Vallabhbhai stated :

> "Ordinarily there would be no objection to an application for permission. The Congress has not prohibited such application. But at that stage of the struggle I felt it was impossible for me to apply without compromising the prestige of the Congress when an application was expected to be obtained at the point of the bayonet.
>
> "If, however, intimation of the details of the programme regarding the conduct of the procession was considered convenient enough for retiring from an inconvenient battle, I should be happy to think that without sacrificing anything I also relieved to some extent the embarrassment of the Government and made

it possible for them to retire with honour. But I repeat that no application was made nor has any permission or licence been obtained.

"In the intimation given by me to the District Superintendent of Police of my proposed plan of action against his order of the 18th, there was nothing to suggest that it was an application. On the contrary the copy of the programme clearly indicated that it was intended to test the newly issued order. In any case I have no doubt I would have failed in my duty if I had not given intimation of such an unusual change in the programme in all its aspects, especially when such a change was made for the first time since the commencement of the struggle. It would have been unfair to take the police by surprise immediately after the District Magistrate retired from the field. To my mind surprise attacks are not permissible in a struggle of this nature."

He went on to add:

"I cannot close this statement without placing before the public as well as the Government one important fact which has come to my knowledge whilst I was trying to trace the source of all the mischievous reports that were circulated in the Press about the happenings of the 18th. I came across a curious piece of evidence which probably also accounts for the famous four letters appearing in *The Times of India* in the last week of June, after the arrest of Seth Jamnalal Bajaj and his co-workers, as also for the general attitude of that journal towards this movement throughout. In the issue of the *Statesman* of August 21st, there appears a telegraphic message dated 19th instant from the Commissioner of Nagpur under the headings "Satyagraha to Cease", "Leaders Submit to Authority". The report of the correspondent of *The Times of India* of the same date appearing in the issue of the 20th of August under the heading "Government Authority Recognized" happens to be a verbatim copy of the Commissioner's message appearing in the *Statesman*. Reading the two together it is difficult to make out whether the correspondent of *The Times of India* is the Commissioner of Nagpur or the Commissioner of Nagpur is the correspondent of *The Times of India*. It is possible that the inadvertence of the *Statesman*, unlike its Bombay contemporary, in publishing it as a message from the Commissioner of Nagpur instead of "from its own correspondent", has exposed him. For some time I did not believe that the statement was issued by him. On inquiry, however, I found that it was. I have been told at the same time that the Commissioner of Nagpur was not authorized to issue the statement that has been wired by him to the *Statesman*. Besides I have also found that the Government of the Central Provinces are unable to control the journalistic activities of the

Commissioner. On a former occasion also he had brought the Government into trouble by his activities in this direction in connection with this very movement, in spite of orders not to meddle with the affairs of the Government. In this manner he goes his own way. Whilst I readily acknowledge the genuine desire of the Government for an honourable end of the struggle and whilst I have no doubt that his action is regretted by them, I feel bound to say that the Government cannot escape responsibility for his action in the end."

In acknowledging the conciliatory attitude of the Government, Vallabhbhai said :

"It was the Government's duty to release the prisoners once they had allowed the procession to go through the Civil Lines and I am grateful to the Central Provinces Government for fulfilling that duty. I must place on record also my conviction that that Government has been most desirous of bringing this struggle to an honourable conclusion."

In concluding his statement he observed :

"I can truthfully say that I am not in the least elated over our victory. All honour goes to those who went to jail and suffered all manner of hardships, and to those who were prepared to suffer even further hardships on account of this struggle. All honour goes to the Congress Committee of Nagpur which showed amazing organizing capacity and was tireless in its efforts. They all will always look back with pride upon this struggle which was fought with weapons of purity and fearlessness. It will fill the people with faith in the superiority of the weapons of truth, non-violence and self-sacrifice."

In a later speech at Ahmedabad, he met some points of criticism :

"In advising the volunteers to maintain silence when passing in front of the Christian church as also the houses of Europeans, I was asking them only to act in a manner which was courteous and in keeping with our dignity. I wanted the British to appreciate that it was not our intention to hurt their feelings in any way. We were opposing only what we considered to be an improper step of the Government.

"It is natural, of course, for those who believe that a struggle of this kind should have been conducted in a different manner to think that I have erred. I was for nine months with Mahatma Gandhi in the Kheda struggle. He invariably informed the Government before taking a step against them and their orders. Had I been in Nagpur right from the outset, I also would have done likewise. As long as the Government order remained,

the fight continued. When the District Magistrate withdrew it, however, and the Police Superintendent began acting under his normal powers, I informed him of the manner in which I proposed to fight him. To not one of the volunteers, when he was released, did the Government say: 'Do not do so again'. The Government knew and so does everyone else that these were men of indomitable spirit, who would act again in precisely the same manner should need arise."

The Home Member issued a joint statement with Vithalbhai. To it Vallabhbhai had no objection. Meantime, the European Civilians of the Central Provinces were on the war path. They were angry and annoyed at the attitude of the Governor and the Home Member. They, therefore, pressed the Chief Secretary to issue a statement which was published on the 8th of September. In it the facts were given an entirely wrong twist which compelled Vallabhbhai to retort:

"Both Shri Patel and the Home Member very rightly say in their joint statement that neither party would publish an account of any of the interviews. The Chief Secretary has however freed me from this obligation and if the Government chooses to deny any of the statements I will make hereunder, I propose to publish not only the whole correspondence but also the full account, as far as I remember, of the interviews.

* * * *

"Firstly, as for the interview with the Governor, Mr Vithalbhai Patel got a letter from the Chief Secretary requesting us to see him and discuss the situation with him. We did so and during our conversation it was suggested that we should interview the Governor. We were not called upon to make any reply to this suggestion, and we made none. Next day Mr Vithalbhai Patel got a letter from the Chief Secretary intimating to us that if we desired to see His Excellency he would be glad to see us at 11 A.M. next day at the residency. We accordingly interviewed His Excellency and discussed the whole situation for nearly three hours. We had never made any oral or written request for an interview.

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"Secondly, as for permission for procession, the statement suggests that we applied for permission. Nothing of the kind, however, was done. My letter to the District Superintendent of Police speaks for itself.

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"When Mr Vithalbhai had his first interview with the Home Member before the Council sitting, the Home Member after consulting his other colleagues wrote to Mr Vithalbhai that the Government had no objection to the passing of processions if someone on behalf of the Congress Committee approached the District Magistrate in that behalf.

* * * *

"We at once wrote back to say that we could make no such application to the District Magistrate whose very order had given rise to the Satyagraha movement.

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"The suggestion in the statement of the Chief Secretary that we applied to the District Superintendent of Police is, therefore, wholly incorrect and grossly misleading.

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"Thirdly, the statement that we gave an undertaking that the prisoners would not take any further part in the Nagpur flag agitation except under certain conditions is baseless and appears to have been deliberately introduced for obvious reasons.

* * * *

"Fourthly, there was no undertaking given by the Government to us nor by us to the Government on any point.

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"I would add in conclusion that all negotiations and interviews were conducted throughout by Shri Vithalbhai Patel and lately by both of us when in view of the unequivocal statement amounting to an invitation for negotiations made by the Home Member in his speech in the Council, the Working Committee authorized us both to do so. All these interviews and negotiations were conducted strictly on a basis of mutual trust.

* * * *

"The Chief Secretary has chosen to publish a one-sided and distorted account. We waive our objection to the publication of all (not such of them as they like) letters written by us and now in the possession of the Government, and we claim that the Government Members can have no objection to our publication of their letters in our possession."

Such straight talking compelled the officers to realize that discretion was the better part of valour and there was no rejoinder.

Although the manner in which the conflict was concluded was in accordance with the principles of Satyagraha, it was clear that those principles were not as well understood as one might have expected. Indeed, some Congress leaders and nationalist newspapers openly expressed their reluctance to accept the fact that the Congress had won. Some usually well-informed persons felt that to carry on discussions with the Government when we were at war with it, was tantamount to surrender and involved giving up of the principle of non-co-operation. Ever since South Africa, Gandhiji had urged that in any fight — whether violent or non-violent — agreements, discussions and understandings have a definite role to play. The Satyagrahi should have no hesitation in giving his opponent every facility which is consistent with his principles and his self-respect. He should not seek so much to compel his opponent to surrender as to ensure that truth prevailed and that the fight was conducted cleanly and with pure motives. The greatest gain of this particular struggle lay in the new spirit which filled the volunteers, who came out of prisons. They said to Vallabhbhai: "The hardships which we experienced in jail have not in the least diminished our keenness; on the other hand they have increased it. Therefore, find other tasks for us, so that we may again serve in the cause of independence and, if necessary, undergo even greater hardships."

CHAPTER XXI

THE OUTLAWS OF BORSAD AND PUNITIVE POLICE TAX

While Vallabhbhai was still in Nagpur, Borsad was preparing another important task for him. Dacoity had become rampant in that Taluka and murders and robberies had for some time been on the increase. The explanation of the police for their failure was that the people were giving shelter to the dacoits and assisting them in various other ways. The people maintained, on the other hand, that the police were, in fact, in collusion with the dacoits and that dacoities took place with the full knowledge and connivance of the police. The local officers were of the view that additional police was necessary for arresting the dacoits and that the expenditure on account of the additional police should be recovered from the local people by means of a special punitive tax. The Government accepted this view and on the 25th September 1923, imposed a tax of Rs 2,40,074 on the Taluka, to be recovered at the rate of Rs 2-7-0 per person, everyone over the age of 16 without exception being taxable for this purpose. The people found it particularly galling ; it was they who were suffering from the dacoities and they were now being told that they were encouraging them and further that they should pay for the cost of capturing the dacoits.

As soon as Vallabhbhai returned to Ahmedabad from the special Delhi Congress, he was informed of this injustice and tyranny. In consultation with the Provincial Committee, he directed Mohanlal Pandya and Ravishankar Maharaj to proceed to Borsad and after studying the situation, to submit a factual report. Mohanlal Pandya and Ravishankar Maharaj went from village to village and not merely collected all relevant information but sifted it very thoroughly so as to get at the facts. The gist of the report which these two veteran workers submitted was as follows :

A man named Babar Deva, resident of Golel, was subject to the Criminal Tribes Act. He was required to

register himself every day morning and evening at the police station. For some reason he was not able to go one day and for that failure, he was sentenced to imprisonment for six months. He escaped and then started committing small thefts. The police put pressure upon his fellow villagers to secure his arrest. One villager kept telling Babar's mother that only if Babar was arrested, the village would be saved from this continuous harassment. The mother informed Babar of this. Babar remained home the following day, and when as usual that man came along, Babar cut off his nose and ran away. From that day onwards, he became an outlaw and started on a career of dacoities. Gradually he collected a big gang and extended his sphere of activities by committing dacoities on horseback and by using fire-guns. In all he must have committed, or been responsible for some 25 murders. It was rarely that he beat or killed anybody in the course of his robberies. Only when he suspected someone to have given information to the police regarding his movements, he proceeded to kill that person. He even killed his wife and some relations whom he suspected as having joined a conspiracy to secure his arrest. The murders of some of these informers were committed in a particularly brutal manner. Some were nailed to trees and in other cases, their noses were cut off. Such terroristic methods had completely cowed down the people. The police for their part merely warned the outlaws instead of using the information they received to arrest them. They even went at times to the length of passing on the names of their informers to the dacoits. One of the several instances referred to in this account concerned a Rajput, who had given a statement to the effect that when once he saw Babar Deva and other outlaws congregated on the outskirts of the villages Nondhana and Amalpar, he took the local Sub-inspector of Police and a police party to the place. The police did not arrest them although they themselves were in greater number but instead behaved in such a way that the dacoits were able to run away. They started beating a Harijan ; the poor fellow screamed. Hearing his screams, the outlaws naturally

bolted. This incident seemed to suggest that the police were in league with the outlaws. It was surprising that while a number of local residents were killed by these marauders no policeman ever received an injury. Another incident which was quoted in this report related to a First-Class Magistrate who was going from Vasad to Borsad. On the way he met an outlaw. Instead of using the gun he had with him, he allowed it to be snatched away by the outlaw, who slapped him and let him escape when he pretended to be a clerk.

In addition to Babar Deva there was another leading Muslim outlaw, by name Ali who belonged to the village Borsad. Once in the course of a quarrel on the outskirts of Borsad over some mango trees, he killed a local lawyer in broad daylight and then ran away and took to dacoity. He had a colleague in Uttarsanda who used to take charge of his stolen property and assist him in other ways. Whether because he was bribed by the police or because of fear, this man reported against Ali and had him arrested. But after he got him arrested, he was frightened of the consequences, and so planned to have Ali released. Ali was in an under-trial prisoners' lock-up. After informing Ali of his plan, he told the police that if Ali was allowed to escape, he would promise to assist them in arresting Babar. The police liked this plan and so they arranged to let Ali escape. As soon as Ali got out, he invited Babar to meet him. Babar, however, came to know of the plot and so did not respond. Ali then put it to the police that as Babar had evidently doubted his good faith, the best thing would be for the police to let him (Ali) go on committing dacoities so that Babar's suspicions of him would be allayed. Only then it might be possible for him to get Babar to come and be arrested. The police accepted this proposition and so Ali got freedom to commit dacoities. From the proceeds of these dacoities, it was alleged that the police were given a share in return for a generous supply of guns and ammunition.

Five policemen used to be stationed as a punitive police party in practically every village. In larger villages, the strength of the police party was larger. The villagers were

greatly harassed by the policemen. The day the Committee went to Asodar, they found that the same morning, five policemen, 1 Jamadar and 12 Dheds * had gone into the fields to collect hay. They had made a rule to take five bundles of hay from each Patidar and three from each Baraiya. In this way, they collected about 150 bundles. The party then compelled a vegetable dealer to give them vegetables free of charge. When that dealer ventured to ask for payment, not only was he not given any money but was beaten in the bargain. In addition, they picked five seers of vegetables from the vegetable gardens of Vagharis. † Similarly, potters, too, were harassed. They compelled them to fetch 10 to 12 pairs of pots of water every day.

The report of these two workers concluded with the following words :

> "We have seen things for ourselves in a great many villages and have made careful and detailed enquiries. We are satisfied that by far the greater part of the public is completely innocent. The outlaws commit robberies at night; the police commit robberies during the day, and on top of it all, the people are being dubbed collaborators of dacoits. The people maintain that the police is dishonest; it gives to the outlaws guns and ammunition, and fills its own pockets by sharing in the looted property."

On the basis of this as well as reports of Government officers, Vallabhbhai came to his own conclusions. He gave a gist of them in his address to the Taluka Conference as follows :

> "It seems that an outlaw named Babar made his appearance in Golel in 1917. He indulged in petty crimes in the beginning. When the Government fails to detect crime or inflicts on a wrong-doer punishment out of proportion to his crime, the man turns into a brute. Babar has been at large all these years, and has committed numerous crimes. Instead of arresting him, the police sent panicky reports against the people and have tried to make out that they are guilty of complicity in his crimes. On these reports the Government imposed punitive police on two villages, Khadana and Jogan two years ago, and ordered the cost to be realized from a poll-tax on Patanwadias and Dharalas, the communities alleged to be guilty of complicity. But you know how entirely useless the

* A caste of untouchables.

† A backward class sect which work on the land.

police was. In Jogan itself Babar murdered a man named Shibhai in broad daylight. The police could have caught him then and there, but they rested content with alleging that people do not give information against the outlaw. In Golel the outlaw assaulted the punitive police. The people saw the District Magistrate and said they could not pay the fine. The Mamlatdar also reported that it was impossible to realize fine from people who, not being contumacious, were too poor to pay it. This he said in his letter P. O. L. 245 dated Borsad 16th February in which he protests against the imposition of any further burden. "No villager," he said, "seems willing for the continuance of the additional police in the villages." The District Superintendent of Police disagreed with this Mamlatdar — the man on the spot — and insisted that the impost should be continued. His reasons were that Babar and his gang were still at large, that though Babar killed Shibhai in broad daylight, no evidence was forthcoming! What are the policemen in the village doing? How are the people to furnish evidence, if the police are impotent to do so? The third reason is that Khadana Patanwadias never give information about outlaws, that they on the contrary shelter them and give them food and drink, and so on. One of the reasons is that some of the Khadana Patanwadias would join Babar's gang, were it not for the check imposed by the special police. The funniest part of the affair is that the Collector disagreed, in turn, with this Superintendent of Police, and he reported entirely differently to the Commissioner. His letter too is in my possession. He was against the continuation of the additional police in either of the villages because "the additional police are useless to prevent" Babar's being sheltered in the villages, but he felt that there was a general increase of crime in the whole of Taluka, and "every village is directly or indirectly, more or less responsible for the general breakdown of order," and so he suggested that some additional force may be imposed on the whole Taluka as may be proposed by him after consultation with the D. S. P. It seems that consultation is at the back of the impost. I may also add that the Collector admitted that the people do not give information or shelter the miscreants "from fear or from selfish desire to save themselves immediate trouble". The Commissioner disagreed with the Collector and the Mamlatdar; he felt that the Superintendent had given solid reasons for the continuance of the police in the two villages for another year and issued orders accordingly. That was in June. How all of a sudden in October the Government resolved to impose the police on the whole Taluka passes comprehension. I have not those communications in my possession. But I am sure about my facts. Every one I have met has told me what has happened. There is a Mussalman out-

law abroad named Ali. When Babar could not be got hold of, the police made friends with this new genius, sought to get rid of an outlaw with the help of an outlaw, and provided him with arms and ammunition. Oh the pity and the shame of it! The Government ceased to rule, making room for the outlaw. Who is going to punish the Government for having leagued with this outlaw? God alone. The Government surely knows what a number of murders and dacoities this Ali has committed, having been armed by the Government itself. No doubt its intention was to catch Babar through Ali, but how are the people to know? I hold the Government responsible for all the misdeeds of that miscreant Ali.

"Another thing to be noted is that Ali himself was not an outlaw originally. He had murdered a Borsad Vakil in broad daylight, just a stone's throw from the police station. But the police could not lay hands on him. Surely any one who can thus see through the impotence of the Government, would turn an outlaw when later he is made friends of.

"The only reason assigned by the Government for punishing a whole people is that they do not provide information or evidence. Let us see how far this is true. Babar has to his credit 22 murders. Not one of the victims was a rich man. He did not murder them for the mere fun of it. He murdered them as they were informants. If after 22 such informants were murdered, the Government seriously argues that the people do not give information, shall we ask how many policemen were murdered? An informant was crucified to a tree by Babar. How many would Government have to suffer the fate of this informant? An informant's job is no easy job then. A first class magistrate was waylaid by an outlaw on his way from Wasad to Borsad. The outlaw gave a smack on his face, and wrested his rifle from his hands. The poor fellow had to represent that he was an ordinary clerk and not a magistrate, to escape with his life. A government with such a magistracy has no title to exist, has surely no title to punish a people.

"All these things go to show that the Government knows that the people are innocent. But the Government has no money. It still wants to hold its head erect before the princely States in the vicinity. Those States have imposed on their villages additional police to protect them from those very outlaws, but they have not taxed their *raiyats*. Our Government apes those States in imposing the police but money it tries to find out of the people's pockets. Well, if it wants money, let it beg of us. But why should it cast a slur on our name, why should it asperse our behaviour, treat us as criminals and extort the cost of the police as fine?

"What then should you do? I see that there are some exceptions. Those who can be charged with the utmost complicity in the crimes are exempted—viz. the Government servants. My information is that every petty village officer knows the whereabouts of these outlaws, but is afraid of them. We may note that even the new M.L.C. is not exempt from the fine. What a curious commentary on the Government which thought our Reception Committee Chairman good enough to be elected to the Council, but not good enough to be exempt from fine!

"Let us then make up our minds. Do not for a moment think that you are fighting for the paltry amount of Rs 2-7-0. If you do so, the sooner you pay the fine the better. You are fined because of complicity in crime, because you are suspected of sheltering the outlaws and befriending them. I ask you to fight only if you are convinced that no power on earth has the right thus to impugn your character. Let us plainly tell the Government that we are honourable men of character, we shall not sign certificates of our bad behaviour with our own hands. We refuse to pay the fine. You might plunder us if you like, like the outlaws, and realize the fine. Fight the fight then like Mahatmaji's men—his men do not need a stick or a *dharia*, they need brave backs to receive blows. Do not be tempted into anger, do not be tempted into violence, for the tempter will be there. Now then I ask you if you are prepared to fight, raise your hands. (*Up went all the hands.*)

"One thing more. Complaints have reached me that the punitive police is oppressing you, that they are plundering your fodder, that they have not even hesitated to molest our sisters. A Government servant told Shri Tyabji yesterday that steps are immediately taken by the Government whenever such complaints come; the people need only put in their complaints. I ask you not to lodge such complaints. The police is imposed to prevent *zoolum*, and you have to complain against their own *zoolum*! We shall not recognize this police. Let us have our own Volunteer Corps. I ask you to raise a corps from amongst yourselves. I ask young men to give their names to Durbar Saheb Gopaldas.

"I appeal to all such present here, as have ever helped the dacoits in any way, to realize that it is a hateful thing. I ask them to give up that nefarious business. I ask Dharalas amongst you to give up drink. I may warn you that the Government thinks of removing you from the District, and penning you up in a criminal settlement. That will be a sorry plight indeed. I ask you, each and all, to reform yourselves, and let not a whole people suffer for the misdeeds of a few ruffians."

Before imposing this unjust levy on the whole Taluka, the Government of Bombay sent its Principal Information

Officer to Ahmedabad and Borsad with a view to creating through the Press the right atmosphere for the tax. Soon after his visit, *The Times of India* published a series of articles on the outlaws of Kheda District. The articles sought to place the blame on the people and indeed suggested that the Kheda Satyagraha movement had led to lawlessness and consequent increase in crime. Replying to this particular point at the Conference, Vallabhbhai said that if an investigation had been made of the criminal registers for the past 30 years, it would have been clear that the lowest figure for crimes throughout that period was achieved during the period of the Kheda Satyagraha movement and of Gandhiji's residence in the District. It was evident that the articles in *The Times of India* had been either written by the Information Officer, or the data on which they had been based, had been furnished by some senior local officers. It is significant that the Government orders for the appointment of the punitive police in the whole area followed immediately upon the publication of these articles in *The Times of India*.

Vallabhbhai had also come in possession of a confidential circular of instructions issued by the Police Superintendent to all the Sub-Inspectors and Head Constables requiring them to turn a blind eye to dacoities and offences committed by Ali, as he had undertaken to assist in the arrest of Babar Deva. Pandyaji and Ravishankar Maharaj had referred to the popular belief in the existence of such an arrangement in their report but, as Vallabhbhai had now secured definite documentary evidence in support of that statement, he was able to challenge the Government with confidence.

To understand the situation it is necessary to know the conditions which led to periodic outbreaks of dacoities in this area. The villages bordering the river Mahi in Kheda District were populated, in the main, by Patanwadia and Baraiya communities. Most of the dacoits belonged to these communities, who claimed to be Kshatriyas. Leading families of these communities were certainly at one time minor Jagirdars and Thakurs. Many used to join as soldiers

in the State Forces. Their history during the last 100 years or so shows how gradually, thanks to the law courts during the British administration, they lost their land steadily to money-lenders who were non-agriculturists, and to Patidars who were agriculturists. The result was that in the course of time most of them were left with no means of livelihood. Bold, adventurous and warlike as they were, it took but little to turn them towards theft and dacoity. Apart from economic considerations, any social injustice aroused so much anger in them that almost invariably they embarked on outlawry.

If one compares the outlaws of Saurashtra in Meghani's books with the outlaws of Kheda district, one may possibly hold that the outlaws of Saurashtra were more courageous and had a higher code of honour; but the outlaws of Kheda District for their part had also a definite code of honour. Throughout this period when dacoities went on on an organized scale, there was not a single case of a woman having been attacked; nor did the dacoits ever rob an unaccompanied woman. Indeed when Babar Deva visited a village, he used to feed the Brahmins, and if a Brahmin was too poor to get his daughter married Babar gave him money. The outlaws believed that they earned merit through such deeds and, in any case, these actions made them popular with the masses, and that was of great value to them in their profession.

The Criminal Tribes Act was, however, responsible for creating the larger number of dacoits and outlaws. The Act was applied to the whole of the Thakore community of Kheda District. It required all the grown up persons of the community, men as well as women, to have their presence recorded every day morning and evening at the Police Station. If at any place in the neighbourhood any offence was committed, many of these people used to be run in under Sections 109 and 110 of the Criminal Procedure Code. As they could not offer adequate sureties, they were then sentenced to imprisonment. Men who were not normally disposed to crime were converted in this manner into criminals. The nuisance of daily attendance at the Police Stations

was too great for some so that they ran away from their homes, and once that happened, just because they were unsettled, they were quite often compelled to adopt the profession of theft and robbery. New revenue and police officers, as they came to the area, made no effort at winning them out of their bad habits but tended instead to be severer to them, with the result that even more people took to crime.

To revert to the main subject, even before the Provincial Committee met at Borsad on the 1st of December, Vallabhbhai had collected ample material to prove that the Government's case for the imposition of the punitive tax was untenable and unjust. The admirable report which had been prepared by Pandyaji and Ravishankar Maharaj was examined very closely by Vallabhbhai. He subjected the authors of the report to so rigorous a cross-examination that Ravishankar Maharaj admitted later that, for a moment, he felt annoyed that instead of being thanked for the trouble they had taken in collecting so much data with such care, they were being treated as if they were the guilty party and could not be trusted. He did not know Vallabhbhai well and in his resentment he even formed a mental resolve never again to work with so strict and stiff a person ! Later when he heard the speech which Vallabhbhai made in the Provincial Committee praising the report, he realized that the severe cross-examination was designed to make quite certain that the report was based on indisputable data. Instead of adhering to his resolve never again to work for him, he became one of the most devoted of Vallabhbhai's workers.

The resolution, which at Sardar's instance the Provincial Committee approved, was as follows :

"After a careful study of the report of the Committee, which was appointed to inquire into the reasonableness or otherwise of the imposition of the punitive tax of Rs 2,40,074 on 88 villages of Borsad Taluka and 14 villages of the Anand Taluka, this Committee is satisfied that the Government has proved itself unable to protect the public from dacoits and outlaws. It is the duty of the Government to protect the public and to make adequate police arrangements for the purpose. Instead of discharging this duty of theirs, the Government charged the innocent public falsely with complicity with dacoits and imposed a punitive tax

which is wholly unjust and tyrannical. This Committee, therefore, advises the people to fight this injustice, to refuse to pay the tax, and, for the sake of their self-respect, patiently to bear whatever hardships they may have to as a consequence."

On the following day, the Conference of the entire Borsad Taluka was held. In spite of the fact that it was convened at a short notice of only 8 days, the attendance was good. Every inch of the *shamiana* was filled and the overflow was so great that there were probably as many outside as inside the *shamiana*. Representatives from every village on which the tax had been imposed had come to the Conference. In his speech, part of which has already been quoted, Vallabhbhai referred in scathing terms to the assistance given to Ali :

"This fine has been imposed upon the people on the ground that they had been assisting the dacoits. But what fine would it be proper to impose on a Government which assisted the outlaws by giving them guns ? God alone can impose an adequate fine for such an offence. The Government must indeed be in a bad way, otherwise why should it have been necessary for it to join hands with a murderer ? It is impossible to believe that the Government does not know how many murders and dacoits had been committed by this outlaw after he had been given the weapons. It may be that the Government was quite genuine in its belief that Ali would help them to arrest Babar Deva, but how can people know that that was the Government's intention ? The Government must now publicly announce that they had committed a mistake. The responsibility for the various atrocities that have been perpetrated by Ali on the poor public rests entirely on the Government."

Vallabhbhai then went on to describe the people who had been exempted from the punitive tax :

"It is the duty of Government servants to arrest the offenders ; they have failed to discharge this duty and yet they have been exempted. Missionaries have been similarly exempted, presumably because if they were described as companions of outlaws, they would oppose the Government with their guns. But the converts, the Christian Dheds, have not been exempted. Mukhis and village servants have also been exempted, and yet it is a fact that every village servant and every Police official knows quite well where Babar is to be found, though not one of them has the necessary courage to arrest him. While all these people have been exempted, the members of the legislature are treated on a par with the rest of the public as associates of dacoits."

Vallabhbhai then explained why it would be wrong to pay this tax:

"If we oppose this levy for the sake of saving Rs 2½, the conflict would be meaningless. The entire point is, we are not companions of thieves and dacoits and the Imperial Government has no right to say so. Only if you feel that way, should you start this fight. It does not matter if the Government takes away your property worth Rs 10 for the recovery of Rs 2. To pay Rs 2½ to the Government for the privilege of being described as companions of dacoits is worse than letting yourselves be robbed by outlaws or dacoits. We are honourable and respectable men, and are certainly not associates of robbers."

He laid particular emphasis on the essential condition of non-violence when fighting the Government:

"During the conflict, officers of the Government and your opponents will do their best to tempt you into violent ways but do not allow yourselves to be so tempted. This conflict is going to be conducted along Gandhiji's way. There is no need for either a *dharia* * or a stick. We need only strong shoulders. Let the Government strike those shoulders as hard as it likes. If you retaliate whether with abuses or sticks, the Government has ample authority and power to crush you. It is not able to arrest the outlaw, Babar Deva, but it will have no difficulty in arresting you. There is nothing very wonderful in abusing or hitting anybody but there is real greatness in undergoing hardships for the sake of what you regard as your duty."

After the conditions of waging the struggle and the attendant dangers had been explained to them in detail, the people resolved unanimously not to pay the tax. Vallabhbhai, thereafter, appealed for volunteers for the struggle saying that there was an opportunity which had come the way of the youth of Gujarat to stand by the people at a time of grave difficulty. It was impossible that the youngmen of Gujarat, who had so readily gone to the assistance of Nagpur, should be found wanting in enthusiasm to assist the suffering people of their own province. The response was good and the majority of the volunteers came from the Taluka itself. A scheme for the struggle was drawn up. The volunteers were divided in platoons and each platoon was entrusted with the task of looking after one or more villages. Leaflets were regularly issued from Borsad,

* A scythe attached to a long bamboo stick.

explaining what the people had to do; how careful they should be; how important it was to work with unity and to give up all internal squabbles. In the first of these, Vallabhbhai said:

> "Only by carrying out your pledges can you retain your self-respect. The Government will confiscate your property, take away your cattle and will have no hesitation in attaching for the recovery of Rs 2½ property worth Rs 25,000. All that you should bear patiently but under no circumstance should you pay a pie or react violently. The Government has adopted for itself, the untruthful and dishonest path. Truth is on your side. If you adhere to the principle of non-violence, you are bound to succeed. Anyone who is honest and who practises non-violence can never lose. May God give you strength to bear the hardships patiently."

Vallabhbhai held a meeting of the citizens of Borsad on the day before the Taluka Conference was due to meet, and urged them to give serious thought to the importance of this struggle. He advised them not to think of such a struggle at all if they could not stop their internecine quarrels. He said:

> "Borsad has assumed large responsibilities. If you are determined, others will follow; but if you weaken, others will suffer. It is not a question of two or three rupees: we are not beggars that we cannot afford to throw away 2 or 3 rupees, but the Government wants to take that much money after calling us the associates of dacoits. If the Government admits that its finances are poor and that its authority has vanished, we shall be quite prepared to take over the administration."

The response in Borsad was superb. The people met together community-wise and resolved that no one should pay the fine and that whoever purchased any attached property should be required to pay a fine of Rs 50. Most villages agreed.

The Government also started its work in earnest by attaching properties. The Mamlatdar suspended all other work and employed all his clerks on attachment work. In order to terrify the people, additional police, equipped with guns, was employed. It was claimed that the police was being maintained for the protection of the people but they were actually used for protecting the attachment clerks, although in fact, the attachment clerks did not stand in need of protection, as the people had taken an oath of non-violence.

Reports of attachment started coming into Borsad from different villages. As had happened during the Kheda struggle, valuable property was seized for the recovery of petty amounts. Again, as before, though perhaps in a more effective manner, the unity of the people made it physically difficult for the attachment officers to carry out their duties. Thus, in Sunav, the Circle Inspector, the Talati, the Mukhi and the village *chaprasi* set out to make recoveries. At one place they found that menfolk were absent. On being asked, the women, who were present, replied that the houses were there and it was up to the officers concerned to take away whatever they liked. The Circle Inspector asked the village *chaprasi* to bring out the utensils. He refused to do so. The Circle Inspector then asked if he would carry the utensils to the *chora*, if he himself brought the utensils out of the house. That also the *chaprasi* refused to do, and expressed his readiness to give up his service, adding that while wealthy people may do all they could to protect their wealth, he had very little to lose, could find service there or anywhere else, and refused, therefore, to be frightened into compliance. Then the Circle Inspector asked the *mukhi* for his assistance. The *mukhi* replied that he was the head of the village and his honour was dear to him. He could not go into people's houses to take away their utensils. The Circle Inspector took down written statements from the *mukhi* and the village *chaprasi*. Then he tried to hire labour but could not get any. In the end, he had to return empty-handed.

As soon as the work of attachment commenced in earnest, the people organized their defence against it. At the entrance of the village on a tall tree a volunteer was stationed with a big drum. He would start beating it as soon as he saw the attachment party arriving. The men would, on hearing the drum, lock up their houses and take their cattle outside the village for grazing. The womenfolk used to remain inside the houses, although the houses were locked from the outside. The village boys would keep wandering through the village singing and shouting that no one should pay the unjust tax. The houses thus remained

closed and locked up during the day throughout the period of the campaign and were opened only at night. The market too opened at night, and women used to go out only after dark to fetch water.

The attachment policy thus failed completely. The Mamlatdar issued notices for the forfeiture of land belonging to people who had failed to pay the punitive tax. Immediately, a leaflet was issued on the signature of Darbarsaheb *, in which he congratulated the people on their success and said :

> "The Mamlatdar has served notices on holders of land warning them that their land will be confiscated if the tax is not paid within a certain period. We do not think that this has been done with the knowledge of the Government. There would be scarcely any difference between the policy of a State and of an outlaw, if land were to be confiscated for recovering fines amounting to two rupees and four rupees. Babar Deva's gang compels people to give them money by threatening to take their lives, while Government officers threaten the people to take away that on which their livelihood depends in order to recover its tyrannical and unjust imposition......The Mamlatdar's threat can only have been made on his own, without even the knowledge of the Collector; for a fine of this nature, land cannot possibly be confiscated. Nevertheless, if the Government comes to the conclusion that that can lawfully be done, we will welcome such a step. The more unjustly the Government acts the nearer will come the day of its destruction."

The struggle lasted in all five weeks. Though it was bitter, the people took it easy and even enjoyed it as a game of hide and seek. The Revenue and Police officers who had been imported into the Taluka to assist in the work of attachment caught the contagious humour of the people, and enjoyed it. Sometimes senior officers would start out secretly for some village but before they arrived in it they found the news of their impending arrival had already reached the village, thanks to the very efficiently organized volunteer messenger system and every house was locked up and the village deserted. All that they could do then was

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* Darbar Gopaldas, a ruler of a small State in Saurashtra; a staunch Congressman and Gandhi-ite, who early in his life was deprived of his State on account of his independent attitude and political views.

to wander through the village and rest if they wanted to do in the veranda of some house. Sometimes, however, the officers came dressed in Khadi clothes and Gandhi caps, pretending to be volunteers. The village people were then taken in and the volunteers could not prevent attachments. Even then the officer could get but little, for almost everyone had sent off to safe places their valuables including their brass and copper utensils, and used only earthen pots and pans, for cooking and for bringing water from the well. There were instances of attachment officers trying forcibly to enter a house, only to find themselves resisted by the womenfolk, and the spectators would be afforded the amusing spectacle of an officer trying to push the door open while the lady of the house tried to keep it shut. Sometimes one would succeed and sometimes the other. There were occasions when agriculturists going to the market to sell their cotton crop were stopped by the attachment officer and conducted towards the police-station. In most such instances, the volunteers were able successfully to intervene and divert them not to the police-station but to the Satyagraha Camps. The following day almost invariably the agriculturists found themselves charged with the offence of theft. The police who did not have the courage to arrest the outlaws had to show some results at any rate, and so quite frequently they arrested people sleeping in the outskirts of a village and beat them. Indeed from the moment the Satyagraha commenced in the Taluka, offences had ceased to occur. The outlaws too, if they were still in the Taluka, had gone underground, or they left the Taluka.

In the early stages, the Government of Bombay had kept out of the struggle, but as it gathered momentum, the Government felt it necessary to issue a statement through its Information Officer explaining why it had been necessary to impose the punitive tax on the Taluka. In the course of the statement, it was mentioned that the Satyagrahis had obtained confidential papers from Government officers improperly and illegally, and that the people showed no inclination to help the police. In support of these charges the Superintendent of Police had also published a report of

some 77 paragraphs. On the 23rd December Vallabhbhai made a strong rejoinder to this statement. He said:

"1. Mr Gennings refers to so-called 'confidential official documents improperly and illegally obtained' by one of us. We can only assure you that those documents, however, 'confidential' they may be, were the most relevant ones in the case — even more relevant than the formidable array of those with which the Director of Information has endeavoured to enlighten you — and we should have failed in our duty if we had not exposed the hollowness of the Government case as revealed by admissions of their own officers. We are, however, in a position to show that the documents that the Director of Information has ventured to publish believing them to be harmless also help to give away the whole Government case.

"2. We may accept that the Superintendent of Police who has signed the impressive document on which the Director of Information relies, is an officer with a distinguished record. But we are afraid, the record was won by him elsewhere. He has not been long enough in the district of Kheda to give evidence of that record except perhaps in the preparation of that document of 77 paragraphs — a document based on the reports of officers who were solely responsible for the maladministration of the past several years. We do not know the order that he and his gallant band have restored, but if any, it is due to a variety of causes for which the Government can take no credit whatsoever. One of them is the capture of the dacoit Ali, which we make bold to say, was not due to the bravery of the police; another is the capture of Mirkhan by Baroda State Police. A third is the posting of the Satyagraha Volunteers in the Taluka which has gone a great way to relieve the distress. But any relief in the way of restoration of order for which the Government can take any credit, is more than counterbalanced by the disorder and misery caused by the punitive police imposed on the Taluka, and by the fact that the abnormal concentration of police force in one part of the district has rendered other parts insecure.

"3. We see that the Director of Information has accepted the charge of inefficiency of the Police, but has tried to make it out as due entirely to lack of will on the people's part to support the Police and to their lack of courage to help themselves. A study of the report of the Superintendent of Police will demonstrate the utter worthlessness of the excuse. It should be observed that the report relates to the whole district, and no less than a score or more of the cases described are of events that happened in Talukas other than Borsad. We shall only point out the numerous instances in which the people have not only tried to help the police, but have risked and lost their lives:

(1) Para 6. D. S. P.'s Report. The unfortunate man who was crucified to a tree and riddled with bullets was an informer.

(2) Para 7. 'The murder in the case was the outcome of assistance rendered to the Police by the deceased man's family.'

(3) Para 9. 'A Mohammedan who had given evidence against dacoits' was attacked and left with his nose severed.

(4) Para 10. 'The deceased was a witness in a murder case.'

(5) Para 12. Babar shot Bakore in cold blood suspecting him of being in league with the Police.

(6) Para 13. At village Bedwa the dacoits met with resistance, they fired at the villagers, killing two.

(7) Para 14. A Patidar villager who had the 'temerity to oppose the dacoits' was stabbed with a knife.

(8) Para 18. Babar Deva murdered a Police informer at Banjeda!

(9) Para 29. Four villages, all in Borsad Taluka, were raided by dacoits armed with deadly weapons but the 'raiders decamped.' (Surely not out of good will, but because they saw that discretion was the better part of valour.)

(10) Para 32. 'The people having collected, two shots were fired.' (Did they collect there to witness a *tamasha* ?)

(11) Para 34. Four villages were raided but there was only one case of assault and one of extortion.

(12) Para 37. 'A tailor opposed the dacoits and as a result of his temerity received several wounds.'.

(13) Para 37. Babar wreaked vengeance on a Police informer who was brutally wounded.

(14) Para 58. A potter was cruelly stabbed in his chest. (Surely not because he was rich, but because he was either an informer or because he dared to offer resistance.)

(15) Para 60. Suspected informers done to death.

(16) Para 61. The villagers of Sunav 'turned out and followed' Babar Deva.

(17) Para 71. Three vegetable sellers were attacked and shot dead. (Certainly not because their treasuries were full.)

"Now these are several points worth noting regarding these cases. (a) They are taken from a report specially prepared to make out a case for the imposition of punitive police, and which takes no count of the numerous people who furnished information or dared to resist the dacoits and laid down their lives. (b) It also takes no count of cases in which information was given to the police without any subsequent action by the police. (c) It takes no count of cases cited by the Director of Information in his letters as special correspondent to *The Times of India* in October last. The people have dared to give information inspite of the fact that 'Babar swears vengeance against his informants' and 'it is

stated that his hatred against police informers is so intense that he does not spare even his nearest relatives.' Reference is made therein to the way in which Babar Deva murdered his mother and his uncle whom he suspected of having given information against him.

"It is the Taluka of Borsad which was the scene of these deeds of daring which the Commissioner of the Division describes as one in 'which the failure on the part of the people at large to give information or co-operation to the police has been conspicuous'. If the record given above is one of 'demoralization' and 'lack of courage' and 'lack of will to help' a fresh dictionary will have to be issued by the Director of Information.

"To these records of brave resistance we shall only add the cases of scores of villages which have out of their own strength remained immune from the attacks of dacoits and marauders and which because of the organized defence they are capable of putting up, wish that they were free from the scourge of the punitive police, and even of the assistance of the ordinary police which claims to afford them protection.

"In concluding this paragraph we shall only make a passing reference to the plea of the Director of Information that the people should have been capable of greater resistance because of the 'lethal weapons' that the villagers have always ready to hand. What shall we say regarding the prowess of the policemen who inspite of their swords and guns have not been able to capture dacoits who escaped in one instance because it was dark, or in another because the way lay through surrounding fields and standing crops, whilst the poor villagers were fighting for all they were worth with their 'lethal weapons' against dacoits armed with 'guns, *dharias*, bows and arrows!'

"5. But the Director of Information would even acquit the people of the charge of deliberate failure to inform the Police, if his Government can find the wherewithal to pay for the cost of the punitive police. 'The *only question*' says he, 'is whether the police force should be paid for by the public of the whole Presidency or by the inhabitants of the small tract whose lawlessness had rendered them necessary.' The question is not that. The only question is whether a people should be condemned unheard, whether the character of a vast majority of the peaceful inhabitants of a Taluka should be so shamelessly impugned; the only question is whether a Government that admits (para 3 of D. S. P.'s report) that the continued success of dacoits' depredations has 'completely cowed down the law-abiding sections of the district' can consciously punish the section cowed down.

6. But we have touched only the points raised in the Director of Information's reply. Whilst he has questioned our

right to publish certain damaging documents he is indifferent to the most serious charges that we have made against them. Why is it that whilst so many informers have been shot or murdered, in cold blood, no police has been touched? Why is it that inspite of so many informants having been murdered, the Police up to a few days ago failed to capture the arch dacoits? The charge of the public against the Government is that they allied with a dacoit who was known to be a murderer, provided him with arms and ammunition and allowed him to go unchecked on his career of murder and loot. They have come to believe that all co-operation with such a department of police was futile.

"The Government have been culpably indifferent to the charge we have noted above. Whilst all the documents—published and unpublished—are contrived to throw the whole blame on one dacoit Babar Deva and on the so-called 'demoralized' public, no mention is made of that miscreant Ali in any one of these reports though his career of crimes has been no less dastardly than his brother dacoit. It is, we repeat with all the emphasis that we command, a guilty silence. The last, though not the least, charge which has also been left unanswered is that the Government imposed the police, knowing that it was useless to do so, and that the public did not need it. The District Magistrate in his letter No. 184, 13th April 1923,—one of the 'confidential document' we have 'illegally' obtained—was emphatically of opinion that 'the continuance of the additional police is not desirable in either of the villages', that 'the police parties never move out of the village, and their presence does not reduce the number of men otherwise required for the police of the Taluka,' that 'they do not even serve the purpose of preventing crime, as the murder of Shibhai in Jogan in daylight proves, to say nothing of the attack made on the similar police parties in Golel.' He also frankly confessed that 'from the application I have received and from the statements of a deputation of non-Dharala residents of Jogan who recently came to see me, it appears that they do not need such protection' (i.e. the protection of the punitive police), and 'would much prefer to be without the police altogether than to have to pay for them.'

"7. The question then, the public will ask, is where shall we fix the responsibility for the general state of criminality in the District—we are here concerned with that in the Taluka, and what has been done to remedy it. We have not the slightest doubt that the Government have to thank themselves for it, that they are reaping what they have so sedulously sown. They have chosen to fix the label of 'criminal' on a virile, industrious, agricultural community and having once condemned it, they have daily driven it to a life of despair by the measures they have

devised out of their own desperation. Their most handy weapons have been the Criminal Tribes Act and the notorious security of the Criminal Procedure Code which are so framed as to lend themselves to almost indefinite abuse or which an ingenuous over-zealous officer finds easy to abuse. 'Well thought out and carefully calculated solutions were suggested to meet the situation, and these received the strong support of several district magistrates, but,' mourns the officer, 'unfortunately for various reasons they were negatived, and so owing to continued criminality on the part of the Dharalas the work of reiterating these proposals like a Penelope's web continues.' While one officer is prepared to admit that the 'ultimate cause of this abnormal amount of crime is partly an economic one,' he feels, 'it is not one that can be easily removed;' another thinks that 'the attentions shown to these people have not been adequate, that the leniency with which they have been treated up-to-now has been utterly misplaced,' and that 'in lieu of improving them the half-hearted and completely inadequate Hazri measures taken up under the Criminal Tribes Act have resulted in their retrogression,' and consequently presses for measures 'indicative of determination and strength' under the Criminal Tribes Act. 'It will now generally be admitted,' says the D. S. P., 'that after nearly a decade's trial this Hazri measure has proved completely abortive.' We think the officer is mistaken. The measure has borne enough fruit in the shape of increased crime. The remedy has been worse than the disease, but rather than radically alter the remedy it has been always thought proper to intensify it. If poison aggravates the malady, one way is to make the dose stronger, and dispatch the patient; another is to alter the dose altogether and put him on the way to recovery. It was no wonder that proposals for a more determined use of the 'Criminal Tribes Act' were long negatived. It is a wonder that they should have been countenanced at all.

"If anything was needed to complete the ravages of the application of the Criminal Tribes Act, the security sections supplied it. Imagine a district in which in one single year there should have been no less than 1800 cases under the security sections. What is the poor wretch to do if he is to be put into jail on the slightest suspicion? Better, he thinks, to court jail by defiant crime than to be ever the object of police suspicion and police attentions. The economic aspect has never been faced and the District Magistrate fears that it may not be possible to face it at all. Even temporary relief as suspension of payment of land revenue in a year of failure of monsoon has been too frequently denied, and the Deputy Secretary to Government naively suggests 'that the force to be employed should be as strong as the general

population can pay for' — not under usual conditions, not if they can afford — but 'under pressure'! In almost every year of famine there is the cry of 'false annawarees' and the full measure of revenue is exacted where it should not be.

"Having refused to face the economic aspect of the case, and having been unable to tackle the question of moral reform of the community the Government have naturally not looked beyond the limits of the Criminal Tribes Act and the security sections, and the final desperate act has been the imposition of punitive police. As has been noted above, the District Magistrate was of the opinion that the punitive police had failed to serve any useful purpose and that no villager wanted it. But the police was imposed with a vengeance and the people are not yet free from their oppression.

"8. We do not think we need discuss here what in our opinion would be the proper solution of the case. We shall only say that the little experiment of posting trained experienced Satyagraha volunteers in every village of the Taluka who will take to every home the message of non-violence, truth and Khaddar is already proving successful and if the Government retires, — as we think it ought, with good grace, — from the area, we shall gladly share with the people of the village the responsibility to keep peace and order.

"9. It is now beyond our purpose here to narrate the long tale of woe of the Borsad peasantry, the way in which the punitive police has terrorized them, the way in which attachments are carried out, and how the life of the people has been rendered insecure by those who profess to keep them in security. We can only describe that condition of things as atrocious.

"10. It has been our duty in the circumstances detailed in the foregoing paragraphs to advise the vast majority of the innocent people of Borsad to refuse to pay the unwarranted impost and to resist with all their might and power of endurance, the attempt to cast an unmerited slur on their character."

After issuing this statement in reply, Vallabhbhai was going to Kakinada to take part in the Congress Session. On his way, in Bombay, he spoke at a public meeting on the Borsad struggle. The people there were angry with the Government after reading Vallabhbhai's statement exposing Government's activities in Borsad. Vallabhbhai said very plainly :

"I have been able to secure copies of certain official correspondence and with the help of those papers have exposed the Government's disgraceful policy. If that is regarded as an offence

in law, let the Government prosecute me. I am sure that I shall have no difficulty in answering such a charge. In order to arrest one outlaw, Government officers thought it wise to seek the assistance of another outlaw, to furnish him with arms and ammunition, and to allow him to commit dacoities and murders at will. What reply does the Government have to this public charge which I make ? None so far as I can see. The Government in fact has betrayed the people. Who can prosecute the Government for it ? It is the Government which is the confederate of the outlaws and yet it is that same Government that has now come forward to collect punitive fines from the innocent public. Could there be a better illustration of the thief punishing the magistrate ? "

This speech was published in every newspaper of Bombay with large headlines. The Governor of Bombay, Sir Leslie Wilson, had only just assumed charge. He was taken aback at such a serious charge being thus publicly made against the Government. He immediately sent the Home Member to Borsad to investigate on the spot. The situation that had now arisen left no alternative to the Government but either to withdraw the punitive tax and admit its mistake, or to arrest Vallabhbhai and prosecute him. The Home Member, Sir Maurice Hayward, arrived in Borsad on the 4th January, 1924. After ascertaining the official side of the story from the Commissioner of the Northern Division, the Collector and the District and local magistrates and police officers, he called a joint meeting of the popular leaders of the Taluka and the officials. The local officers invited a selected 150 men whom they considered to be their supporters. These men met together among themselves before coming to the meeting. They selected one Ramabhai, a pleader of Borsad, as their spokesman, and decided that as the majority of them did not know English, Ramabhai should talk in Gujarati only. Some two to three thousand people had collected in front of the Home Member's camp. He sent word that he would have no objection to all those who had assembled remaining where they were, if only they would keep seated in an orderly and peaceful manner. The people immediately sat down as if at a public meeting. None of the public workers like Darbarsaheb, Pandyaji or Ravishankar Maharaj went to this

meeting. The invited leaders formed themselves into a procession and marched from Vinay Mandir to the camp of the Home Member. Immediately on arrival they informed the Home Member that one of them will speak as their representative but that he would do so in Gujarati. As the Home Member did not know the language himself, the Commissioner of the Northern Division took upon himself the task of interpreter, translating to the people in Gujarati what the Home Member said and to the Home Member what Ramabhai said in Gujarati.

In his introductory remarks, the Home Member said: "His Excellency the Governor, who has only recently arrived from England, is personally interested in this movement and is surprised that up to this date he had not received any representation from the people regarding their grievances." Ramabhai replied that the people had lost all confidence in the method of representation for securing redress of their grievances. They had represented many matters in the past but all to no purpose, and so they had decided to give up that method. Besides, it was surprising that in a matter so blatantly wrong the Government could even suggest that it could take action only if it received a representation from the people. Interrupting Ramabhai, at this stage, one of the non-officials present stated that as a matter of fact four applications had indeed been sent to the Government on this subject. This neither the Collector nor the Commissioner could deny. The Home Member then remarked that as law and order had been restored with the help of the additional police, it would not be necessary to retain the additional police much longer in the Taluka and so the whole question would solve itself very shortly. In reply to this, Ramabhai gave many instances of harassments, and threats and other hardships which the people had had to suffer at the hands of the additional police. On being told that they should bring such matters to the notice of the superior officers, Ramabhai pointed out that there was no one to whom they could complain. Pointing to the Deputy Superintendent of Police, he remarked: "That gentleman went only two days ago to the village Nisraya and

threatened the people that if they did not pay the tax, he would send to their village the outlaws who had come to village Jhalund." The police officer attempted to defend himself by saying that he had merely urged the people to pay the tax and pointed out that if they failed to do so, the additional police would have to be removed, and then the outlaws would go and rob their village. A villager from Nisraya immediately got up and said this was incorrect as in the first place there was no police at all in his village to be removed! Thus, concluded Ramabhai, the statement he himself had made that the police officer threatened to send the outlaws to the village was the only correct one.

The Home Member then asked if they had any suggestion to offer which would lead to the early arrest of the outlaws. Ramabhai's reply was, "If the Police Department continues to be as it is today, not only will the existing outlaws not be arrested but new ones will be created. When the outlaw Ali was arrested it was announced by the Government's own Information Department that an outlaw by name Ali was arrested from the jungles of Uttarsanda. Now we all know that there is no such thing as a jungle in or around Uttarsanda. Ali was in fact arrested at the house of a Patidar colleague of his who lived in a house outside the village. It is also a well-known fact that the Inspector, Maganlal, who is also sitting here, is a personal friend both of the outlaw Ali and of the Patidar of Uttarsanda. Everyone also knows that it is the Patidar of Uttarsanda who got Ali arrested and again in collaboration with the Police had him released. It is clear as daylight that there is the closest contact between the Inspector, Maganlal, and the outlaws. Many other misdeeds of this Inspector, Maganlal, were brought out in a case in the court of the Deputy Collector, Mr Gandhi. If you wish to know what they are, you have only to ask Mr Gandhi who is present here." The Home Member remarked that "whatever the Deputy Collector has to say on this point he will doubtless tell me", and asked Ramabhai to continue with his statement. The latter thereupon said: "If your officers encourage the outlaws in this manner instead of arresting them, how can you ask us to

pay a tax? Only if you get rid of such corrupt police, would it be possible to bring the outlaws to book. As a matter of fact, since this movement commenced, several outlaws have written to the Satyagraha camp that they are anxious to reform if only they are given an opportunity." After other such charges regarding the work of the police, the Superintendent of Police of the District was asked to inform the meeting of the steps that had been taken by the police in order to arrest the outlaws. The officer immediately started reading out the names of some 30 to 40 people from a list he had brought with him: "The well-known outlaw so and so was arrested, and the notorious so and so was killed, and so on." When he finished reading, Ramabhai remarked that of the names read out by the District Superintendent of Police, not one was well known and none was an outlaw. "If you ask anyone in this meeting, he will tell you that not one of these persons is known as an outlaw." The Home Member felt after this that it would be best to terminate the meeting. Ramabhai, therefore, wound up on behalf of the people with the remark: "If after hearing all these details, the Government comes to the conclusion that the tax should be withdrawn, let it not be suggested, as has happened on some previous occasions that you are withdrawing the tax because the people are begging you to do so, or because the people are poor, and they are unable to pay the tax. We are not so poor that we cannot pay this tax, but we have a just cause. That is the reason why we are determined not to pay a single pie as punitive tax to the Government." Before terminating the meeting, the Home Member stated that all further attachments had been ordered to be stopped, and that he would place before the Government the results of his enquiries.

The following day some local officers took with them a few non-officials to see the Home Member, in order to undo some of the mischief done the previous day in regard to the behaviour of the police. Of each one of them the Home Member asked only one question. "Were you present at the meeting yesterday?" If the reply was, 'yes', the man was immediately asked to withdraw. The Home Member

was satisfied that the Government was in the wrong. Almost immediately after his return to Bombay on the 8th January, the Government of Bombay issued the following press note :

"His Excellency the Governor, through the Member-in-Charge of the Home Department who has at His Excellency's request during the past few days personally visited the Kheda District, has made special enquiries into the necessity of maintaining the extra police force at the expense of the people of the Borsad Taluka. His Excellency has considered the results of these inquiries in Council and has come to the conclusion that it is necessary to maintain for some time to come, a substantial police force over and above the normal force of the Taluka for the protection of the people and for organizing further operations for the suppressing and hunting down of the outlaws. At the same time he has decided that a case has been made out for remitting the collection of the extra charge at present involved. It is true that the past supineness of the people generally has been due largely to the outrageous and inhuman methods of some of the well-known dacoit leaders. Further, the partial failure of the late rains has rendered it difficult for some sections of the people to raise funds to meet the cess for the payment of the extra police force. The Governor in Council has therefore resolved that the cost of the extra police which have already been drafted in, shall be met during the current year from general revenues and that the Legislative Council shall be asked to vote funds for the continuance of operations during the next financial year.

The Governor in Council believes that the people of Borsad who have already experienced the benefit of security as the result of the presence of the extra police force will respond to this policy of liberality by cordial assistance and co-operation in the further operations necessary for suppressing the violent crimes from which their Taluka has so long suffered."

Vallabhbhai immediately issued a statement declaring that the struggle had come to an end. He said to the people :

"Once again there has been a triumph of truth, non-violence and penance. This victory has been as quick as our struggle was just. It is unique in that both the parties have won. The Government has admitted their mistake openly and with courage. The Government has thus gained a victory by admitting the truth and declining to follow the normal practice of refusing to admit a mistake for fear of loss of prestige. We would be failing in our duty if we did not congratulate most sincerely His

Excellency the Governor of Bombay, Sir Leslie Wilson, for showing so much moral courage.

"Our victory does not lie in the decision of the Government to return the fine which had been collected, and of the property which had been attached, or even in its decision to bear the expenditure on the additional police. In a way, of course, our victory lies in the Government's withdrawal of the charge made against us. But the real victory lies as much in our ability to understand the greatness of the decision itself as in the humility with which we reconsider it. A Government is always afraid of admitting its mistakes. The Government always considers it a risky thing to appear to be yielding to its people even when it is a case of rectifying an injustice. This is the first occasion when the Government had admitted its mistake publicly and yielded to a fight fought with the weapons of Satyagraha. Instead of merely giving a verbal assurance that there will be no abuse of this courtesy of the Government, it would be more appropriate for us to prove our appreciation by our future conduct."

He then referred to an important omission in the Government's statement:

"The consequences of the Government's policy over a period of years for the Dharalas of Borsad have been very different from what was intended. We do not deny that the Government's object was honest but the Government cannot be unaware that the consequences have been unfortunate. It is necessary to deal with this unfortunate tribe with sympathy and with kindness.

"We regret also to find that there is not a word in the Government's statement expressing their sympathy with the families of a large number of people who have lost their lives in their effort to arrest or help in the arrest of one or two murderers and dacoits. We have been compelled to mention this in the context of the last paragraph of the press note issued by the Government."

It was natural that so complete and swift a victory should arouse over-enthusiasm among the workers. But from the following letter which Vallabhbhai wrote to Darbarsaheb and Pandyaji, it will be clear that in accordance with the principles of Satyagraha Vallabhbhai exercised the greatest self-restraint:

"Bhaskarbhai has just this moment brought to me your leaflet and your speech. These have put me in something of a quandary. I feel that what you have written is inappropriate both in the context of our struggle and of our victory. A Satyagrahi can be said to have understood Satyagraha only if, when he wins, he

does not let his opponent feel the bitterness of defeat. If we publish these articles, I am afraid that we shall detract from the greatness of our victory. Though with very great regret, I must, therefore, over-rule you and stop their publication. I am convinced that you will after a while accept my advice as correct. For us the right thing to do on this occasion is not to utter one word against Government officers. Let us take stock of our own weaknesses and make a start ourselves with the task of improving the condition of the people. Only then could we say that we had won.

"In the programme for tomorrow's meeting, I feel it would be well to have only prayers and devotional songs suitable to the occasion. I trust that you will be generous enough to accept my advice. I shall explain further in person when we meet."

On Saturday the 12th January, the conclusion of the Borsad struggle was celebrated in a big way. Large numbers of people assembled. Many had come from Ahmedabad and Bombay. In the meeting which had been called when the campaign started there was an attendance of 5 to 7 thousand people, but at this meeting there were at least 25 to 30 thousand people present. A significant fact of this struggle was that women participated in it in as large numbers and as eagerly as men, and women constituted quite one fourth of the attendance at the meeting. Men of all communities were present — Patidars, confident of their achievement and of their importance, fine well-built Baraiyas and Patanwadias with their long sticks and their hubble bubbles, and Garasias * with large turbans.

Addressing them, Vallabhbhai urged:

"Do not look at the faults of the Government, but think instead of your own weaknesses. Your relatively small quarrel with the Government is over; but our main big quarrel (regarding independence) is still unresolved. Let us stop looking at the Government's shortcomings, until we are ready to join issue with the Government on that bigger issue. Let us make a quick study of our own shortcomings, and do what we can to remove them so that we may be ready for the final conflict with the Government.

"During this short struggle, consider what great sacrifices you have made, what courage you have exhibited, what unity you have maintained, and what enthusiasm you have shown. It is only because you have shown yourselves capable of these that you have been able to obtain what you wanted. You have not succeeded

* A class of Rajputs who usually owned or cultivated land.

because of my skill or cleverness. Today we have gained this victory because we walked along the road laid down for us by that great saint who is now in jail. So far we may be said to have only repaid to him the interest on the debt we owe him. But there still remains the repayment of the debt itself. If we studied well the lesson which he has taught us, if we understood fully his teachings, there cannot be any outlaws amongst us.

"The present conflict is over. Let sweetness and friendship reign hereafter. Let there be no harassment or punishment of those who paid up the tax through fear or through weakness, or who gave facilities for the attachment to be carried out. I know that you propose to celebrate the victory; by all means do so. But my advice to you is to invite to that celebration all those who carried out the attachments as well as the police. You have no quarrel with them now. Make friends with the Talati, the Mukhi, the Ravania — all the village officers in fact and the police. Forget all about the attachments carried out by them.

"This year there has been inadequate rainfall in the Taluka. There is a difference of opinion between ourselves and the Government regarding the yield. The Government's estimate is made with a view to collecting as much land revenue as possible. Ours is made with a view to not paying it if possible. Therefore, there is a difference in our estimates. But if we do not pay this year, we shall have to pay it next year. We have only just concluded one struggle and it is not wise for us to start another so soon afterwards, unless, of course, it is unavoidable. For the moment we would be well advised to concentrate our efforts on consolidating the gains of our successful struggle. Therefore, I advise you to pay your land revenue assessment in accordance with the Collector's orders. It is easy to accept advice which you approve of, but independence will only be possible if you are prepared also to accept advice such as this which you do not like."

Vallabhbhai then went on to put before them a long-term programme of work:

"Let us create in our villages an atmosphere where thieves and dacoits cannot prosper. It is our duty to wean them over. To the rich here let me say that it is you who have suffered most from dacoities and if they continue, it is you who will suffer in the future also. Therefore act in such a way that in future dacoities do not take place. Do your daily work in such a way that you do not act contrary to the dictates of your conscience. Try and understand why the masses are so hostile to you. Neither the police nor the Government can protect you. The police will only investigate after an offence has been committed, while the Government's policy is such that it cannot afford you complete protection. Therefore if you do not act in the fear of God but are

determined to make money at the expense of the poor, you will reap the consequences. Be content with a moderate profit and do not seek to squeeze the poor dry. No one likes to adopt a career of crimes or to become an outlaw. One takes to it only when one is desperate and is driven to it by necessity. If you treat such people with sympathy, you may be certain that they will not become criminals.

"And to the outlaws, let me say, a real outlaw does not keep running about with a little gun, robbing and murdering the innocent. A real outlaw does not require a weapon. Whoever harasses a defenceless person, or robs or murders innocent informers is a disgrace to his community."

After the meeting at Borsad, Vallabhbhai moved from village to village in the Taluka for four days, and kept repeating his message. Pandyaji and Ravishankar Maharaj settled down amongst Baraiyas and Patanwadias and tried to show them how much happier they and their women and children could be if they only forsook lawlessness. Their efforts met with undoubted success and today it would be no exaggeration to say that the Baraiyas and Patanwadias are as good as any other group of people in India.

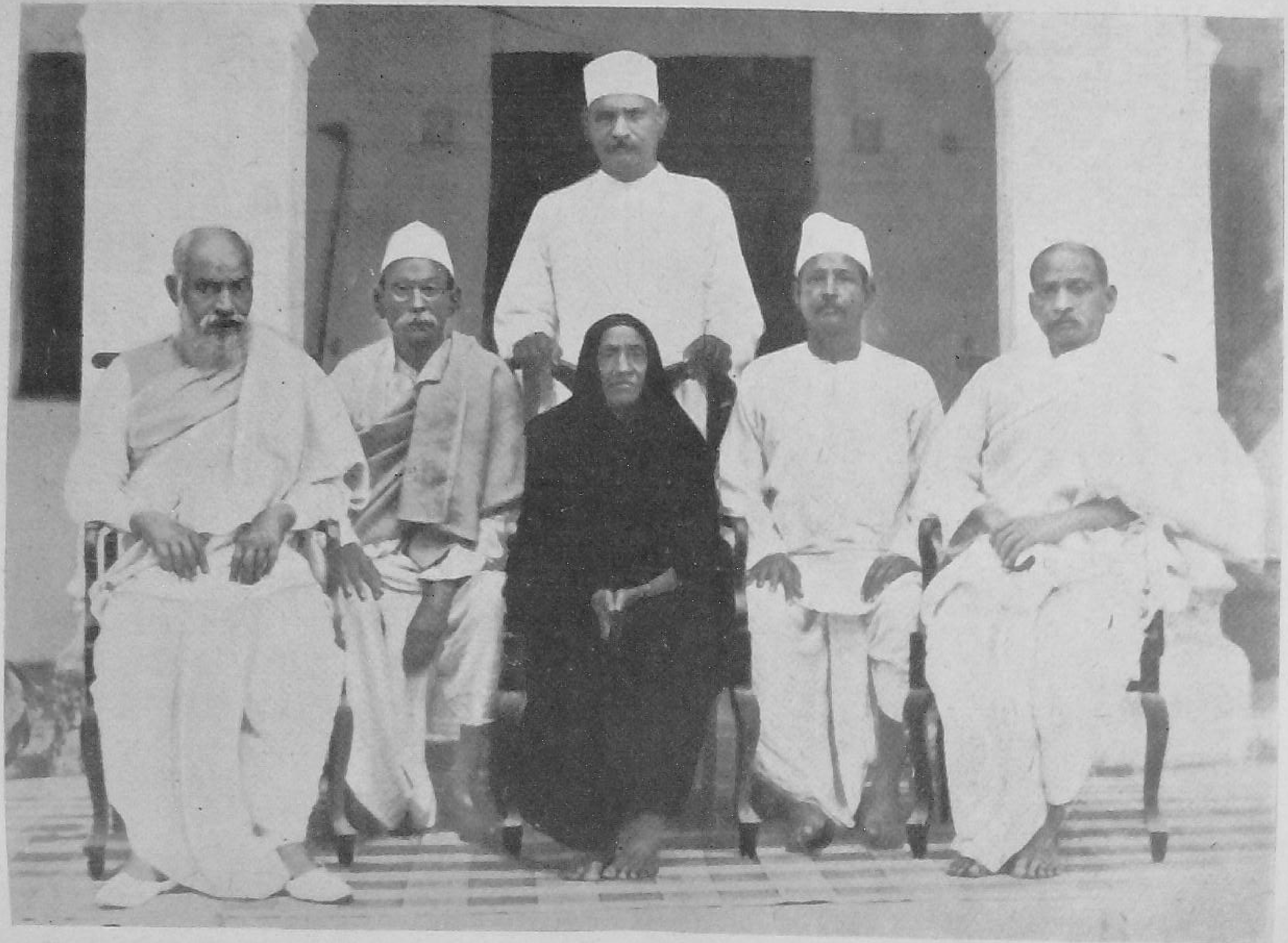
During the period of nearly a year before and also after the conclusion of the Borsad struggle, a number of bold thefts took place from goods wagons between the stations of Nadiad and Baroda. Members of the gang used to get on the open wagons at night when the train was travelling between two stations, and to throw out from such wagons whatever they contained, and their colleagues would pick them up as they fell. As a goods train is usually fairly long, neither the driver nor the guard was able to spot these daring robberies. The robbery was committed by Baraiyas and Patanwadias, and the goods were sold by apparently well-to-do and better class people living in the villages along the railway line. The gang bribed the police, and the culprits could not be traced. The greater their success, the more adventurous the gang became. Sacks of sugar, bales of cotton and cotton cloth, and other such materials were sold in large quantities in the villages of this area. Sugar was sold at a rupee a maund and imported cloth was sold likewise extremely cheap. The consignors

complained bitterly to the railway authorities who increased the strength of their police on the trains but without avail. At last the Government decided to establish punitive police in all the suspected villages and imposed a punitive tax. Only a few men in every village were guilty of these offences but the tax was imposed on every man in the village, so there was naturally a great deal of discontent. Besides, these villages began to be looked down upon by others, so much so that boys of these villages found it difficult to get girls in marriage. The more decent leading men of these villages felt that something should be done and they appealed to the Provincial Congress Committee. Vallabhbhai told them that if the leaders of every village concerned were prepared to guarantee that no further offences will take place in their village, he would willingly intervene. "I realize," he told them, "that you cannot accept such responsibility immediately on behalf of the Baraiyas and the Patanwadias, but as the stolen property is being received by members of the higher castes, if they were to stop receiving it, the Baraiyas and others will not find it worth their while to continue their robberies. If after you have done this, anyone commits a theft, you must be prepared to hand him over to the authorities."

Vallabhbhai sent Mohanlal Pandya to make enquiries in the villages. Pandyaji held meetings in village after village and persuaded the people to comply with Vallabhbhai's instructions. Receivers of stolen property, however, did their best to create difficulties for Pandyaji, for so far as they were concerned it was a sound business proposition for them, at the cost of a few rupees a year paid as punitive tax, to make quite large profits from the stolen property. The matter went on thus for two years, so the Government decided to take more stringent measures. Peoples' houses were searched and much property was attached. Naturally, many innocent people were harassed in the process, and everyone was thoroughly dissatisfied. If this state of affairs continued much longer the villages would have lost all morale.

At a meeting which was called at Anand of the inhabitants of the villages on which the punitive tax had been imposed, Vallabhbhai explained to the people that it was not enough that they should individually be innocent, and free from blame. They must also have the strength to eradicate such evil practices from their midst. If only the good men of these villages had the courage to divulge the names of those in their neighbourhood who committed these offences, no one will dare commit them. Many had represented against the punitive fine, but behind those representations there was lack of readiness on the part of the people to accept responsibility for assisting the authorities.

The advice had immediate effect and the leaders of each one of these villages assumed responsibility for ensuring that no stolen property entered their villages. Thereupon Vallabhbhai wrote to the Commissioner of the Northern Division and said: "For the last three years the Government has been imposing a punitive tax on these people, and now it has commenced attachments for the recovery of stolen property, but without the desired result. While these measures have added to the hardships of the innocent, the guilty have managed to flourish. For eradicating an evil of this nature, the real remedy lies in placing reliance upon respectable leading men of every village. I have started doing this with the help of my volunteer workers, and I am satisfied that thefts of this kind will not occur in the future. I am prepared to make such a statement publicly, and would request you, therefore, to withdraw the punitive tax and return the property which has been attached. As in Borsad if you can trust the people and the public workers, I am confident that the results will be satisfactory. If in spite of this assurance, you cannot see your way to withdrawing the punitive tax, I shall be compelled to advise these villages not to pay the tax and to start a campaign of Satyagraha." The Commissioner was in camp at that time in Bharuch. Abbassaheb Tyabji, as President of the Kheda District Congress Committee, went there personally to deliver the letter. After reading it the



With the Family at Nadiad, 1927

Commissioner said to Abbassaheb: "If you remove the last sentence of the letter, I shall forward it to the Government of Bombay recommending the withdrawal of the tax." Abbas Saheb replied: "I have come to deliver to you this letter of the President of the Gujarat Provincial Congress Committee. It is beyond my competence to change even a word or a comma in it. The tax ought to be withdrawn; please do whatever you think is appropriate. We have been able to stop offences from occurring and we are prepared to guarantee that they will not occur in the future." The Commissioner did not press his point, and in a very short time orders were issued withdrawing the tax and returning the attached property to their respective owners.

CHAPTER XXII

A PEEP INTO HIS DOMESTIC LIFE

For the most part Vallabhbhai had no personal or domestic life. Since the time he joined Gandhiji in the Kheda Satyagraha movement, he abandoned all ideas of making money. Vallabhbhai was very fond of his family. It was one of his cherished ambitions to assist in every way his family, understood in the wider Indian sense of the term. Gradually, however, the whole country became for him akin and all those who worked for the country were to him like members of his family. This widening of his circle did not diminish his affection, for he loved all of them dearly and made their welfare his own.

He finished his studies in spite of poverty and without being a burden to his family. When he started practising as a lawyer, he was hard put to it even to set up his house. He had to purchase cooking utensils and other articles of necessity second-hand at public auction shops in Nadiad. Before he had time to settle down in Godhra, plague broke out there and so everything came virtually to a standstill, and he had to carry on by drawing upon his meagre savings. Even then, he was anxious to do what he could to

assist his family. Thus, writing to his elder brother on 16th March 1901, he said :

"The plague is on the increase here. There is no work in the Courts these days nor is there any possibility of work during the next 2 or 3 months. I have, therefore, to live on my little 'capital', but let that not worry you. We must be thankful to God that I was able to pass my examination. When normal conditions return, all will be well. I had intended to come there after I was properly settled here but I am afraid I will have to wait a while. But you may rest assured, I shall eventually be able to help you. That indeed, is my first anxiety. I am ever grateful to God that He has enabled me to be conscious of my duty towards all of you.".

Within three years, Vallabhbhai was able to help his father in paying off the family debts and to provide for his younger brother's higher education. In a letter to his elder brother, on 15th January 1904 from Borsad, he wrote :

"I have written to D. at Nadiad, to pay off N. with interest. I had no idea that the matter was so urgent. It is not proper for you even to suggest that we mortgage any of our sister's things. However, you are my elder brother and I will not question your judgment. I have already arranged for payment to be made. Nothing was further from my mind than to treat the matter lightly; in a couple of days you will receive a letter from N. acknowledging receipt of the money. You write that you have some debts. As I see it, whatever is your liability is also my liability. Please let me know quickly who are the creditors and what is owed to each, so that I can plan to relieve you of all these debts as quickly as possible.

"I would like to make one further request. Will you give up agriculture now and look after only our family affairs ? I shall find the money for household expenditure. Please do not take me amiss. By working on the fields I am afraid that your health will suffer. You have to work very hard and after all, the return from it is proportionately small. Please, therefore, send me an account of all the expenses that you have to incur every month and I shall send you the money.

"Kashibhai * has come there. Please ask him to return at once. Explain to him that he should concentrate on his studies. I cannot understand why he left Nadiad at all. I would like him to go to Bombay. So please see that he comes here at once.

"If Somabhai † is still unwell please send him here. He will

* Vallabhbhai's younger brother.
† Vallabhbhai's eldest brother.

receive proper medical treatment here. Even if he has recovered, it might do him good to come and spend a short time here to convalesce."

In this same generous way, we have seen how Vallabhbhai allowed Vithalbhai to go to England first for his Barrister's course, agreeing to bear not only all Vithalbhai's expenses abroad, but also those of his family in India. When his wife and Vithalbhai's wife did not get on well together, it was, it will be remembered, his own wife who had to go to her parents. When he lost his wife, he refused, in spite of all manner of pressure from friends and relations, to marry again. In extending financial and other assistance to his father and elder brother, he imposed no conditions; he left it to them to run the family affairs as they considered best and appropriate.

At first, it was Vallabhbhai's intention to have his children, Dahyabhai and Manibehn, educated in England. So when he went abroad for the Bar, he put them, as already said, in Queen Mary's High School in Bombay, to remain as boarders with an English lady who was the Principal of the school. The children were brought up on western lines. They had to talk to their teachers in English only, and even among themselves, the brother and the sister, were compelled to talk in English. After they had spent two years as boarders with the English lady, Dahyabhai had a bad attack of whooping cough. So Vithalbhai had to bring the children to his house, and there they remained for quite a long time even after Vallabhbhai's return. Later, Vallabhbhai's plans were so completely changed that he gave up the idea of sending them abroad.

It has fortunately been possible to find a few letters written by Vallabhbhai while he was in England. These, too, underline his great affection for his family, and his devotion to his parents. Some extracts from these letters, selected almost at random, may be of interest. In the first of these he explains why he went to England without informing them.

"I was compelled to come here suddenly as with the introduction of the new rules (which permitted only those

holding an LL.B. Degree of India to appear for the Bar), it would not have been possible for me to get admission later. I realize that you have all been somewhat offended, but you will see I had either to come straight away or not at all. God willing, time will fly and I will have the good fortune of meeting you all soon."

A little later, he wrote to his elder brother on 19th January, 1911 to inform him of his success in the first of his examinations. He stood first. When he had completed all his examinations, he wrote in June 1912 thus :

"My examination is over. I have secured first class which means I shall be able to return six months earlier. By God's grace I have been given this concession and I will come there next January. Please inform mother and father."

On his return to India he resumed practice in Ahmedabad and as long as he continued to practise he met the expenses not mainly of his own household, but of Vithalbhai's in Bombay, and of his parents etc. in Karamsad. During the Kheda Satyagraha in 1918, he had to suspend his practice for six months ; and that was the beginning of the end. Soon afterwards, there followed the agitation against the Rowlatt Act and the inauguration of the Non-Co-operation Movement. And then he had to give up his practice altogether. Vallabhbhai had never cared for money for itself, and though his income had been good, he lived well and helped his family and others generously. When, therefore, he gave up his work as Barrister, he had put aside but little money.

In 1914 Vallabhbhai's father expired. A letter written at that time by Vithalbhai indicates Vithalbhai's uncompromising attitude towards the orthodox post-death ceremonies. The letter was addressed to his brothers other than Vallabhbhai.

"You have requested me to come. I would most readily come but only if my wishes are respected. Vallabhbhai might possibly share your views. In that case you may act according to his advice. I do not wish you to accept my advice etc. but if you want me to come, you must let me know if you intend following my advice."

Vallabhbhai was in complete agreement with Vithalbhai on the subject of reforms in the local customs but whereas Vithalbhai chose to adopt an inflexible

attitude, Vallabhbhai preferred to advance by winning over the confidence of as many persons as possible both in society as well as in the family. This was the main temperamental difference between the two brothers.

When Vallabhbhai was practising as a barrister in Ahmedabad he was rarely to be found in his house. His mornings went in looking into his cases and after he entered the Municipality he had always to visit some area or other of the city. He spent his afternoons in the court and in the evenings, he was at the Club whence he would return home at about 8-30 or 9 at night. Owing to heavy work in the Municipality he had later to give up his practice as a barrister. After his association with Gandhiji, he reduced his visits to the Gujarat Club. In its place, however, there grew up a private club of those members of the Municipality who had joined him at the time of the Non-Co-operation Movement. It was in this Club that plans for public activities as well as municipal improvements were planned and developed. At one time, Vallabhbhai used to dine out ; he would take his evening meal at the house of Bachoobhai *alias* Krishnalal Desai or at Dr Kanuga's house. On these occasions, he returned home very late. He adhered to his time-table even after Manibehn and Dahyabhai came to stay with him.

His relations with his children were odd. Perhaps owing to the Hindu custom which required that the younger brother should not play with his children in the presence of elderly persons, Vallabhbhai was not free with the children when he was staying with his elder brother, Vithalbhai. This habit contracted at that time evidently remained with him through life. His son Dahyabhai, however, would force his father to talk to him and play with him, but his daughter Manibehn was very reserved, and as Vallabhbhai also did not take the initiative, they rarely conversed. Vallabhbhai was in the habit of pacing to and fro in his drawing room after his morning bath. Manibehn would stand in the doorway of the adjoining room, watching him. Vallabhbhai would then ask her, "how are you" and she would say, "I am well". That was about all

their conversation throughout the whole day! When her mother died, she was very young and Manibehn never wholly got over her shyness in speaking to Vallabhbhai. Fortunately for her, Dadasaheb Mavlankar was their neighbour and his mother and Smt. Mavlankar looked after her fondly. Manibehn also was greatly attached to the Mavlankars and used to spend the greater part of her day at Dadasaheb's house. It was there that she found the warmth and affection of home-life. Both the children had abundant freedom, but as Vallabhbhai was not demonstrative there was no way of their knowing his deep affection for them. Vallabhbhai, who had himself been brought up in a non-demonstrative atmosphere, must have inherited the belief that that was the right way of bringing up children. Some parents are over-attentive to their children with the result that the children are spoilt. Vallabhbhai's method went to the opposite extreme.

Vallabhbhai's apparent indifference towards his children is brought out admirably in an account of the conversation which took place between Vallabhbhai and his mother, when he went to Karamsad to see her after the Borsad struggle was concluded. After a brief inquiry about Gandhiji and the possibility of his release, the old lady broached the subject of Manibehn's betrothal. Vallabhbhai parried it at first with the remark "whatever is destined to happen will happen". The old lady saw through her son's remark, and observed that she was probably kept alive by God only to enable her to see the day of Manibehn's marriage. Vallabhbhai remained silent. The old mother then inquired about his children's studies. Vallabhbhai was unable to give any reply as he knew very little about their progress! Finally, when Vallabhbhai was about to take leave of his mother, she asked him once more to do something about the matter. Vallabhbhai asked why he should be bothered about it. At this the old lady bitingly retorted that she fully appreciated that he, who did not even know what his children were studying, was unlikely to be able to do much about finding a suitable husband for his daughter.

Actually Gandhiji had taken over Vallabhbhai's

responsibilities as a father, and so Vallabhbhai felt that he himself could afford to be unconcerned. Manibehn used to meet Gandhiji frequently and also to correspond with him. Through her Gandhiji kept himself informed of her and Dahyabhai's studies and their progress in examinations. Manibehn accepted Gandhiji's advice not to marry until Independence was attained ; she went even further and took a vow not to marry at all. She was always inclined to lead a simple and austere life, and as time went on she tended to make it even more austere and simple. For years she has observed the rule of spinning every day, and spun sufficient yarn to provide cloth both for Vallabhbhai and for herself. It was Gandhiji's intention that Manibehn should take up the work of serving the women of India. After she graduated from the Gujarat Vidyapith Gandhiji entrusted her further training to Devdhar ; so she went and stayed at Poona in his Seva Sadan. After that she remained for some time at Wardha and then spent a year or so in Sabarmati Ashram where she worked as the Secretary of the Ashram Women's Association. During the floods in Gujarat in 1927, she served with Narhari Parikh for some time in Matar. But after the Satyagraha of Bardoli she found her mission in life, for from then on until Vallabhbhai's death she lived, as it were, only for her father. In that service, she felt that she fulfilled her life's mission. But for her extraordinary care of Vallabhbhai's health and almost 24 hour supervision over his time-table so as to ensure that no one troubled him unduly, it would have been impossible for Vallabhbhai to discharge all the duties that he did for so long a time. Besides his official duties, Vallabhbhai was responsible for a great many public institutions and trusts, and Manibehn acted as his Private Secretary in regard to all work relating to them.

Although Vallabhbhai appeared to be almost indifferent to his own children he was very fond of his grand-children and the children of his friends. Indeed, he never missed an opportunity of playing with them and of amusing them. That constituted one of the biggest sources of amusement and relaxation for him.

Once they started their public careers, the two brothers, Vithalbhai and Vallabhbhai, hardly had any time together. They very rarely visited their parents at Karamsad also at the same time. In 1927, however, at the time of the floods in Gujarat, when Vithalbhai was the President of the Central Legislature in Delhi, for almost a month the five brothers lived together in Nadiad along with their mother.

CHAPTER XXIII

KAKINADA, GANDHIJI'S RELEASE AND THE SWARAJ PARTY

While the struggle in Borsad was still in progress, Vallabhbhai had to go to Kakinada to attend the annual session of the Congress. No major policy questions were to be discussed at this Congress. As soon as permission was given by the Delhi Congress, the Swaraj Party put up candidates at the November elections and met with considerable success in Bengal, though in other Provinces it failed to secure a definite majority. In the Central Legislature, however, the Party was, together with the Independents, in a position to defeat the Government.

Throughout 1923, the Congress was riven with internal quarrels and generally Congressmen were filled with despair and disappointment. They came to Kakinada in a penitent mood, and were determined not only not to provoke further quarrels, but to try, if possible, to create an atmosphere which would make it possible for the Congress to carry on its work in future with greater vigour. Nevertheless, there were a few extremist members who wanted the Congress to reverse the Delhi resolution which permitted members to participate in elections. This led Rajaji to state in clear terms that that point had been settled once for all, and that no object would be served by recalling those who had entered the legislatures. At the same time, he re-stated the fact that the Congress policy and programme of work had remained unaltered. In consultation with Deshbandhu Das, Rajaji brought before

the Congress a resolution re-affirming the previous resolutions relating to non-co-operation which had been passed at the Congress Sessions held at Calcutta, Nagpur, Ahmedabad, Gaya and Delhi. Congress adherence to the policy and principles of boycott and non-co-operation was regarded as the very basis of its constructive programme and the country was asked to co-operate with the Congress in implementing the constructive programme and in promoting civil disobedience.

Another important proposal considered was the introduction of the concept of "Complete Independence" among the Congress objectives. The proposal was inspired by the insults and injustice to which Indians were being subjected in East Africa. Vallabhbhai opposed this resolution on the ground that the Congress as an organization was weaker at that moment than at the time of the Ahmedabad Congress when a similar resolution moved by Hazrat Mohani had been rejected. The insulting treatment meted out to Indians in Kenya was, he argued, certainly not worse than the implied insult to the country in keeping Gandhiji behind the bars. It was not wise, he urged, to allow our sentiments to carry us off our feet.

Soon after Kakinada, on the 12th of January, when Borsad was celebrating its victory, Gandhiji was operated upon for appendicitis in the Sassoon Hospital at Poona, and on the 1st of February he was released unconditionally. When Vallabhbhai went to Poona to meet Gandhiji, Gandhiji greeted him with the words: "Welcome, the King of Borsad." As against the despair, differences of opinion and disputes generally prevailing in the country, Vallabhbhai had the satisfaction of presenting Gandhiji a Gujarat in which there was discipline, unity and enthusiasm.

As soon as he was allowed to leave the Sassoon Hospital, Gandhiji went for rest and change to Juhu. He resumed writing for the *Navajivan* and *Young India* from the 6th April, and in his very first article commented upon the achievements of Gujarat and on Vallabhbhai's leadership during the period of his incarceration.

"The last two years of their history should make every Gujarati feel proud; and what makes Gujarat proud of itself should also be gratifying to India. Our activities are such that if they benefit one province they cannot but react to the advantage of the country as a whole; and so the advance made by Gujarat is in fact an advance made by India. These achievements are a great tribute to Vallabhbhai's magnificent organizing and administrative ability. And he has collected around himself in the process a band of devoted workers of like mind and ability. The Borsad Satyagraha is a magnificent example of public activity governed wholly by public considerations.

"The Satyagraha struggle at Borsad was in many ways superior to that at Kheda. The latter was merely a vindication of the honour of the people. My fast detracted from the victory of the Ahmedabad Mill workers, for the fast did bring to bear unfair pressure on the mill-owners. In Borsad, however, there was a complete victory for Satyagraha; honour was vindicated and the object was achieved after a straight struggle.

"Let no one think that the victory was achieved because circumstances were favourable. We may congratulate the Governor of the day for accepting the justice of our cause, but the question is, had he been hard-hearted, would he have been able to resist the pressure of the Satyagraha Movement? Circumstances become favourable if those engaged in a good cause are governed by fine and just instincts. It is the Satyagrahi's duty to convert his opponent into a friend and to create the right moral atmosphere.

"If Gujarat had rested on its oars after Borsad, no one would have blamed her. But for the Satyagrahi there is no rest. His rest comes from moving on from one task, when completed, to another. Satyagraha involves self-knowledge, and Borsad gave the people that knowledge of themselves which enabled them to see that the location of punitive police among themselves was due, to some extent at any rate, to their own shortcomings. And when one sees a defect in oneself, it becomes easier to detect other defects also. So the task that the people of Borsad have now undertaken is the one of self-purification. Such a task is more valuable and more difficult than that of merely fighting the Government. To fight and win against the Government is, as it were, a question of preparing the ground for cultivation. But the constructive task of growing crops and harvesting them, i.e. of purifying and reforming themselves, is one far more difficult and calls for more time and patience. It is gratifying to know that this task is progressing satisfactorily. Success in it will constitute a truer measure of the quality, ability and fitness both of the volunteer workers as also of the people of Borsad."

On the 13th of May, the 7th Gujarat Political Conference was held at Borsad under the presidentship of Kakasaheb Kalelkar. At he same time were held the Harijan Conference under the presidentship of Mamasaheb Phadke, and the Thakore Parishad under the chairmanship of Ravishankar Maharaj. Gandhiji wished to attend these Conferences, but as he was still convalescing after his operation, friends and doctors prevented him from leaving Juhu, and he had to content himself with sending an inspiring message in which, referring to the people of Borsad, he said:

> "Borsad has indeed been a credit to Gujarat. By its sacrifices, and by its successful Satyagraha it has rendered magnificent service both to itself and to the country. But Borsad has merely cleared the ground. There now remains for it the task of construction, and that is a difficult task. I know that you have undertaken it but it can be said to be completed only when the whole of the Borsad Taluka uses only hand-spun Khadi, and nothing else; when within its limits there remains no shop which sells foreign or mill cloth; when alcohol, opium and other drugs have been given up; when theft and other crimes have disappeared; when the children of the Taluka, whatever their caste, Harijan or high-caste, are all able to study in National Schools; when disputes disappear, and, if they do take place, are settled by arbitration; when Hindus and Muslims live as brothers; and when no Harijan is treated with contempt. If we are determined enough, we should not find it difficult to accomplish all this. I am firmly convinced that if Borsad can do it, it will bring Swaraj nearer to India. I would ask you to take a pledge to achieve all these tasks, and I hope you will have the strength to take it. It should be taken only if you are fully determined to fulfil it. There must be behind the pledge the determination of Harishchandra *, otherwise it is far wiser not to take it."

The resolutions of the Political Conference were in accord with the spirit of this message. It had a deep effect on all and in particular on Darbarsaheb. He spent a sleepless night, and after a full discussion with his colleagues announced his decision to remain in Borsad and prepare the Taluka for the Independence struggle. Some ten other

* A mythological king of ancient India who was determined to speak the truth whatever price he had to pay.

equally earnest colleagues of his also joined him in this resolve. It was decided at the Conference that certain areas should be selected for this work in Gujarat. The Conference congratulated those men and women who had taken a pledge to dedicate themselves to the service of the various communities in those areas. Vallabhbhai, however, was not one to be carried away by any momentary sentimental impulse or enthusiasm. He had a very clear idea of the difficulties of the Borsad zone, and so he said to the people as well as to the workers that before adopting the resolution, Borsad should give very deep thought. "I doubt," he said, "if there is anyone here who knows Borsad as well as I do. I know full well both its strength and its weaknesses. There are many here who would be only too happy to play on those weaknesses. Borsad, therefore, should not be in a hurry to accept this resolution."

Vallabhbhai drew attention also to the tendency even among tried and seasoned workers to turn to Gandhiji for advice and guidance in almost everything, small or big. It distressed Gandhiji, for it betrayed a feeling of helplessness and reluctance to think for themselves. "It is deplorable," said Vallabhbhai, "that Gandhiji after coming out of jail should feel, as he does, that we have lost confidence in ourselves. It is up to us all to remove that impression from his mind. We can assist in this and incidentally free him from such minor worries if, after passing this resolution, we do not go to him to ask what we should do next but go ahead on our own and fulfil the resolution as best as we can. I would appeal to Gujarat to desist from taking all its troubles and worries to Gandhiji for solution. He has innumerable other problems to solve. Let us learn to help ourselves."

Another important resolution before the Conference related to the appointment of a small committee to prepare a scheme for a Provincial Society of voluntary workers. That scheme, however, was still-born ; but Vallabhbhai brought into being a group of workers whom he trained and nursed, and whom he inspired with the ideals of service which Gandhiji had been preaching. To this day, these workers continue to serve in various sectors of Gujarat. There exists

among them a certain basic unity and they feel as if they were all members of one family. In developing this spirit in these workers, Vallabhbhai played as great a role as Gandhiji.

Almost immediately after his release, Gandhiji had to intercede between the Non-Co-operators and the Swaraj Party. He held numerous discussions at Juhu with the leaders of the two sides. After acquainting himself with the events of the past two years, he tried to understand their respective points of view. His belief in the soundness of the policy of non-co-operation in regard to the five principal heads remained unaffected by his two years' imprisonment. He could see no sign of a change of heart in the Government. In September 1923, an American, Drew Pearson, sought from the Governor of Bombay permission to see Gandhiji, and the words which the Governor then used showed clearly how inflexible was the Government's attitude. Drew Pearson reports his conversation with the Governor as follows:

> "Absolutely impossible", His Excellency cut me short. "The only way to gaol Gandhi is to bury him alive. If we allowed people to come here and make a fuss over him he would become a martyr, and the gaol would be a Mecca for the world. We did not gaol Gandhi to put a crown of thorns on his head."
>
> When I asked if there was any likelihood of Gandhi being released before his six years' term expires, he replied, emphatically:
>
> "Not while I am here. Of course, my term expires in December. They can do whatever they like with him after I go back to England."

Since Gandhiji was released before the expiry of his full term of imprisonment, it is obvious that the Government did not find it necessary to bury him alive. In the greater part of the country, the party which did not believe in any change of policy had begun to lose its hold over the people. Indeed, people were tired of their dispute with the Swaraj Party. So long as Gandhiji was in jail the people naturally felt that it was their duty to do something to show their antagonism to the Government. Possibly the Government realized this and came to the conclusion that a Gandhi

free would be less troublesome than a Gandhi imprisoned. The members of the Swaraj Party had gone into the Legislatures and had started their fight within the limits of the Constitution ; and the Government was well aware that it was a relatively easy matter to cope with them in that field. It was also confident that the entry of the Swaraj Party into the Legislatures would reduce the effectiveness of the non-co-operation of the rest of the Congressmen. Considerations such as these must have weighed with the Government in releasing Gandhiji. It was now for Gandhiji to reorganize his campaign against the background of the new circumstances that had arisen. He wished to re-convert the Congress to the policy of staunch non-co-operation.

On the conclusion of his discussions with the leaders of the Swaraj Party and other leaders at Juhu on the subject of participation in the Legislatures, Gandhiji issued a statement to the Press entitled "Legislatures and Non-Co-operation" in which he made clear that "in spite of my anxiety to fall in line with my friends of the Swaraj Party, I have found it difficult to accept their arguments. It is not as if this difference relates to minor matters or matters of detail. It is a difference of principle. In the non-co-operation of my concept, I still maintain, there is no place for participation in the Legislatures. This difference is not merely one of a difference in the definition of non-co-operation. It is a fundamental difference which in its turn leads to a difference in approach to the solution of the various problems that confront the country today."

Pandit Motilal Nehru and Deshbandhu Das issued a statement to explain their point of view. Following this, Gandhiji in an article entitled "Congress Organization" expressed the view that no one who did not believe in the five-fold boycott and non-co-operation could hold office in the Congress organization. This was only another way of saying that the members of the Swaraj Party could not hold office in the Congress !

"It follows, therefore, that the executive organization of the Congress must not contain titled persons, Government school-

masters, practising lawyers, members of legislative bodies, and persons who use foreign cloth or cloth manufactured even in our mills, and those who deal in such cloth. Such persons can become Congressmen, but cannot and should not become members of executive organizations. They can become delegates and influence Congress resolutions, but once Congress policy is fixed, those who do not believe in that policy, in my opinion, should stand out of the executive bodies. The All India Congress Committee and all the local executive committees are such bodies, and they should contain only those members who whole-heartedly believe in and are prepared to carry out the policy."

Lest it might be thought that he looked down upon the members of the Swaraj Party, Gandhiji went on to say that such an idea never entered his mind :

"It was pointed out to me that it was possible that my views might tend to make Swarajists appear weaker than or inferior to the No-Changers in the estimation of the masses. Nothing can be further from my thought than any such idea. There is no question of quality. It is purely a question of temperamental differences. I have written simply with an eye to effective working of the Congress executives. That working is possible only if the executives are run only by one party. If the Swarajist view is more popular, the executive bodies should be solely in their hands. The Congress must always represent the popular view whatever it may be, whether good or bad. And it is the duty of those who hold contrary views not necessarily weak or inferior, to stand out and work on the popular mind from outside. The No-Changers will be belying their trust, if they regard Pro-Changers as, in any way, inferior to them by reason of their holding different views."

A session of the All India Congress Committee was called on the 27th June at Ahmedabad in order to find some solution to this difference in opinion. In an open letter addressed to the members of the All India Congress Committee Gandhiji explained the basic principles of non-co-operation in the following terms :

"If Government schools and law courts and Legislatures are good enough to attract us, our opposition is clearly to the *personnel* and not to the *system*. Non-co-operation was conceived for a much nobler purpose. If the wish is merely that *we* rather than *Englishmen* man the system, I grant that the boycotts are not only useless but harmful. The logical outcome of the Government's policy is to Europeanize India and immediately we have become Europeanized, our English masters will gladly hand over the reins of Government to us. We would be welcomed as their willing

agents. I can have no interest in that deadly process save to put the whole of my humble weight against it. My Swaraj is to keep intact the genius of our civilization. I want to write many new things but they must all be written on the Indian slate. I would gladly borrow from the West when I can return the amount with decent interest."

All the resolutions put forward by Gandhiji were discussed freely by the two parties in the All India Congress Committee. One of these resolutions was to the effect that only those who believed in the five-fold boycott could be members of a Congress Committee. This was modified so as to make it possible for the members of the Swaraj Party to remain in Congress Committees. Another resolution condemned the murder of an Englishman, Earnest Dey, by Gopinath Saha. That led to considerable discussion. Deshbandhu Das was not opposed to the policy of non-violence of the Congress, but he was anxious that the patriotism and courage behind the action of Gopinath Saha should be recognized. Gandhiji's resolution condemning the murder was passed by a majority of 8 only. He had no objection to his resolution being totally defeated. He realized only too well that the policy which appealed to the world was that of violence, but he was not prepared to agree that acceptance of the principle of non-violence and condoning of violence can go together. He said in the course of the discussion, "By all means if you wish to use violence, use it, but I will not then be with you. I shall be very glad to go to the Himalayas and to send you my congratulations from there. But I dislike entirely the policy that you are advocating here." His third resolution required every member of the Congress Committee to spin for half an hour every day and to give to the Congress as his subscription every month 2,000 yards of yarn spun by himself. The members of the Swaraj Party strongly opposed this resolution and indeed complained that this and other resolutions had been moved with the sole object of removing them from positions of responsibility in the Congress organization. When this resolution was put to the vote, they left the meeting. The resolution was passed by a majority of 30, 67 having voted for and 37 against.

Gandhiji had the resolution modified to the extent of removing the penal part of it which required that a member who failed to send the amount of yarn that he was supposed to send should be regarded as having resigned from his office. He did this on the ground that if those who had left the meeting had cast their votes against the resolution, the penal part of it would certainly have been defeated. This generous action was greatly appreciated by the Swaraj Party.

When the Swaraj Party had walked out from the meeting, there was some joking and sneering at them. This annoyed Gandhiji, who had already been very much put out by the tone of the discussion on the resolution concerning Gopinath Saha. When Gandhiji was summing up the proceedings and a member interjected slighting comments on the principles of the Congress, Gandhiji completely broke down and for a moment could not speak. He soon regained control over himself, however, and said very feelingly :

> "I am a simple man and would like to work with simple men. You all, however, are worldly and shrewd. The Congress is an institution of no mean importance. It is no longer an institution which begs anything of anybody. It is an institution which seeks to achieve its objectives by increasing its moral strength. It will be what you make of it. If you wish to be true to yourselves, go to the villages. You will be able to get me to do an enormous amount of work if you deal with me in a straightforward manner and not in a roundabout way. You may not have faith in me but if you say you have and then betray me, then I can only seek the protection of God and will not work with you."

The effect of these words was electrifying and those who had spoken in a somewhat uncontrolled manner, asked to be forgiven. The Congress President, Maulana, Mohammed Ali, asked forgiveness on everybody's behalf and fell weeping at the feet of Gandhiji. For the moment, this ended the tenseness of the meeting and enabled Gandhiji to placate the Swaraj Party by having the penal portion omitted from the resolution relating to yarn.

Gandhiji had at last discovered how the large majority of his countrymen thought and felt. Defeated and humble,

he wrote an article in the *Young India* and expressed not merely his sorrow but also gave an indication of his future programme of work. It was in this meeting that Vallabhbhai was referred to as a "blind follower of Gandhiji". Whether he was a blind or a discriminating follower, so far as this session was concerned he certainly played the part of a blind follower. As the host of the Congress Committee, he had to leave the meeting on numerous occasions to attend to all manner of 'house-keeping' problems which kept arising, and even though he may have missed the greater part of the discussion, when he came back, he had no hesitation in saying he supported Gandhiji. By his subsequent conduct he proved that his support was not merely verbal but complete. For instance, after the work of the All India Congress Committee was over, he called a session of the Gujarat Provincial Committee on the 12th of July and prevailed upon it to approve the resolution requiring every member of the Congress Committee to spin every day and produce at least 3,000 yards of yarn every month.

After Gandhiji had completed his fast for 21 days in the interests of Hindu-Muslim unity, he was invited by Deshbandhu to Calcutta to take part in some critical discussions with the Government. At that time the Government was following a repressive policy and had arrested a number of Deshbandhu's colleagues on nothing more than suspicion. It was felt essential that the Government should realize that against such a policy the Congress would stand united. With that end in view, Gandhiji accepted the invitation and agreed to whatever the Swaraj Party wanted. He agreed thus (1) to the policy of boycott of foreign cloth being postponed, (2) to the Swaraj Party working in the Central and Provincial Legislatures as a wing of the Congress Organization, and (3) to the members of the Congress Committees wearing Khadi only when they were engaged in Congress work proper.

It is difficult to reconcile all this with Gandhiji's attitude at the time of the Ahmedabad Congress Committee

five months ago. But when Gandhiji started giving in at all, he gave in generously and did not have any mental reservations. At the Belgaum Congress, this reconciliation was formally approved by the Congress as a whole, and a little later in October 1925, at a session of the All India Congress Committee at Patna, under the presidentship of Gandhiji, it was agreed that the Congress should in future guide the policy of the Swaraj Party in the Legislatures. In other words, the Congress was won over by the Swaraj Party. Although for the sake of unity and the larger interests of the organization, Gandhiji, Vallabhbhai and other staunch No-Changers accepted the new policy, they certainly did not like it.

At Gandhiji's instance, the All India Spinners' Association was established, owing allegiance to the Congress but with complete independence in regard to its internal organization and its finances. Gandhiji thereafter concentrated all his attention to developing that organization. Vallabhbhai for his part devoted himself to the task of developing the institutions which carried on constructive work in Gujarat and to the work of the Ahmedabad Municipality. From the purely political point of view, the years 1924 to 1928 may be said to have been years of "depression" for the Congress. With the appointment of the Simon Commission in the beginning of 1928, political activities were again intensified.

CHAPTER XXIV

AS MUNICIPAL PRESIDENT

Early in 1924 the life of the Committee of Management for the City of Ahmedabad came to an end, and the general election of Ahmedabad Municipal Council took place in accordance with the new legal provisions which had come into force, following the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms. The new Board was to have 60 members, of whom 12 were to be nominated by the Government and the remainder elected. 10 of the 48 seats were reserved for Muslims. The local Congress under Vallabhbhai's guidance decided that it should fight the elections as a party. Vallabhbhai had been convinced as a result of his previous experience of municipal work that effective work became extremely difficult without a clear majority. He selected his candidates for every constituency of the city with great care and was successful in winning for the Congress 35 out of the 48 elected seats. With the majority at its command, the Congress Party was able to have Vallabhbhai elected as the President without any difficulty. Except for about a year, the Congress has up-to-date remained continuously in power in the Ahmedabad Municipality.

The Congress Party in the Municipality set for itself a definite policy and programme of work. This may briefly be summarized as follows :

(1) Local Self-Government must be regarded as the first and necessary step in the preparation of the country for Independence, and from that point of view the administration of the Municipality was of great importance. The administration should be carried out honestly and justly, uninfluenced by any sectional interest, and solely for the greater good of the bulk of the people.

(2) In order to make local bodies really independent, all the executive committees of the Municipality should have on them only elected members and not nominated members.

(3) In order that the Municipal Board may be able to act independently, everything possible should be done to reduce the control of the Government in municipal matters.

(4) The Municipality's independence in educational matters should be as complete as possible.

(5) The Municipality should give every encouragement to indigenous production and manufacture.

(6) Steps should be taken to increase the prestige of the true representatives of the country, and to reduce the excessive importance the public was accustomed to attach to Government officials. Thus, instead of addresses of welcome being given to Governors and other Government officers they should be given to popular leaders.

(7) Facilities such as water, drainage, roads and lighting should be provided in the most scientific and efficient manner possible.

(8) Municipal school buildings should be built in a scientific manner and playgrounds should be provided for children at different places in the city.

(9) The most modern, up-to-date and well-equipped hospitals should be established.

(10) The entire administration of the Municipality should be conducted in the regional language. Speeches and resolutions in the committees should also be in the same language. Rules required that the resolutions of the General Board should always be in English. Exemption was obtained from that rule in 1925, and after that date these resolutions too were passed in Gujarati.

(11) Good housing arrangements were to be made for the Harijan servants of the Municipality.

This programme was not drawn up right from the outset and put out as such by the party, but is a summary of the various points and policies which Vallabhbhai put before his colleagues from time to time and for which he sought their concurrence.

Vallabhbhai deplored the insanitary habits and customs of our people. In 1927, as President of the Local Self-Government Conference, he gave a picturesque but realistic description of our cities.

"Our cities are neither cities nor villages. Though living in cities, many of our people behave as they would amidst rural conditions. Half the buildings have no latrines, and there is no place even to throw the garbage from the houses. Although they live in houses in narrow streets and in thickly populated areas, they do not hesitate to keep cattle. Large numbers of apparently unowned cattle are left to wander about in the streets. Ordinarily, people are very lax in observing even the most ordinary rules of health and cleanliness, and indeed in such matters they neither appreciate what their duty is to themselves nor their duty to their neighbours. They do not consider it wrong to throw the rubbish from their own houses in front of the doorsteps of their neighbours. They do not hesitate to throw from the windows of upper storeys of their houses dirt and other rubbish or dirty water. A foreigner on studying our Local Self-Government institutions or when entering our cities would discover no evidence of real self-government. People spit where they like, they ease themselves where they feel like, and generally consider themselves free to cause nuisance, irrespective of time or place. Conditions in the villages are no better than in the cities. At the entrance of every village one finds heaps of manure, while the area round about the local tank of a village is used as a large public latrine. The village well is usually surrounded by waste water and mud, decomposing and foul-smelling. In such circumstances, I regard it as a great sin not to do anything ourselves but merely wait for the Government to mend matters."

Vallabhbhai was thinking at that moment chiefly of the city of Ahmedabad. But many improvements have since taken place in Ahmedabad; it has today many large and small gardens, its streets are well-laid, as wide as they could be made, and wherever possible, trees have been planted on either side of them. I was shown all this in 1941 by the Municipal Engineer of Ahmedabad, and I still remember his remark: "We are trying to build roads and houses to provide other amenities in Ahmedabad on the most modern lines, but the mental outlook and the habits of the greater part of the citizens greatly add to our difficulties." That was the state of affairs in 1941 and the position has not materially altered even today. It is easy to realize what great difficulties Vallabhbhai had to face in 1924 to make the city modern and clean.

Vallabhbhai succeeded in putting an end to several old disputes between the Municipality and the Government.

One such related to a three lakh rupee engine purchased for water supply by the Government of Bombay without consulting the Municipality. As the engine turned out to be of no use, the Municipality was unwilling to pay for it. In the end, the matter was referred to arbitration. The arbitration award went in favour of the Municipality.

Another old dispute related to water supply to the Cantonment. The Government had induced the Municipality to agree to supply to the Cantonment, water at the rate of 2½ annas per thousand gallons. For the same supply people in the city proper were required to pay 8 annas. Although the residents of the Cantonment were thus obtaining water at a greatly reduced rate, they behaved as if their claims came first. As some of the residents were senior Government officials, they were able to obtain the further concession of continuous supply of water throughout the day! In 1920 at Vallabhbhai's instance, the Municipality asked the Cantonment to pay a higher rate. This the latter opposed on the ground that their contract with the Municipality was for a period of 30 years and that during that period the Municipality was bound to supply them water at the agreed rate. While this matter was under discussion, the Municipality was suspended. On return to office, Vallabhbhai took up the matter again and it was decided by the Municipality to give notice to the Cantonment authorities that they would be required to pay from 1920-21 at the rate of 8 annas per thousand gallons of water, and that if payment was not made accordingly, water supply will immediately be cut off. The Municipality decided to go further and taking its stand on an opinion given by the Remembrancer of Legal Affairs of the Government of Bombay, that it was illegal for the Municipality to give water to any area outside Municipal limits, it directed that a notice should be given to the Cantonment authorities that it would not be able to supply water to the Cantonment at all after six months. The Cantonment authorities paid up under protest and then filed a suit against the Municipality for its refund. They also asked the court for a direction to the Municipality that it

should not cut off the water supply pending the disposal of the case. After hearing arguments on both sides, the court refused to grant the injunction. This compelled the Cantonment authorities to come to an agreement with the Municipality. It was agreed that they would build their own water works and that the Municipality would continue to supply water to them for a period of 12 months instead of the previously agreed six months.

During the period of his Presidentship, Vallabhbhai was able to accomplish much. Among the minor, but none the less important and significant steps taken by the Municipality were: (a) The decision to recognize students qualified at the Gujarat Vidyapith, and to accept its examinations as equal to corresponding examinations of the Bombay and other universities; (b) the construction of a new Municipal Hall and Office, the Hall being named 'Gandhi Hall'; (c) the taking over of the management of the Dadabhai Naoroji Library and Reading Room which had been constructed in the city in the memory of the "Grandfather of India, the great Dadabhai Naoroji"; (d) the announcement of its intention to make primary education compulsory in the Municipal area and the preparation of a register of all children of school-going age.

Among the more important problems of the city which called for urgent solution were those of water shortage, the extension of drainage to cover the entire city, and the widening and construction of roads so as to relieve the very serious traffic congestion in the city. Vallabhbhai took in hand all these problems as soon as he became President. He took his responsibility as Municipal President seriously and did not regard it as something to which just an hour or two should be devoted, and that merely for signing papers. Every morning he accompanied the Municipal Engineer to the various parts of the city where work was in progress. In the afternoon he was at the Municipal Office. His relationship with his subordinate officers was such that they worked for him with keenness and enthusiasm. He studied every case in detail, and brought to bear on every scheme, new or old, a wide outlook. He would not allow himself to

be frightened by the size or the costliness of a scheme. If the scheme was to the advantage of the city, he would take it in hand with courage. He did not allow himself to be influenced by any person or a group of persons. Nevertheless by his skill and his ability for hard work he earned the respect, affection and loyalty of all his colleagues whether officials or non-officials. He, too, for his part, gave them individually and personally whatever assistance and support he could. The result was that he created in the Municipality a loyal and efficient band of workers, and the Ahmedabad Municipality became famous throughout the country for its efficiency in administration.

When Vallabhbhai became President of the Municipality, only one third of the city had proper drainage; he planned the extension of drainage throughout the city area within the fort, and saw to its completion during his four years' tenure of office. The pumping station and the sewage farm which went with the drainage, were greatly expanded, re-equipped and modernized. Only after a good drainage system is provided, should arrangements be made for a liberal water supply. Proceeding on this sound principle, Vallabhbhai had planned his scheme of improvement of water supply to follow in the wake of his drainage arrangements. The scheme was for diverting water from river Sabarmati towards the water works wells and for purifying the water. It was drawn up in 1920 by Vallabhbhai, as we have already seen, when he was Chairman of the Sanitary Committee. It was at last approved by the Government with some amendments and put into force. He obtained a loan of Rs 45½ lakhs from the city for completing the water works and the drainage schemes. In order that his schemes may not be found to be defective subsequently in any respect and to avoid criticism, he made a point of inviting the Sanitary Engineer of the Bombay Government from time to time to inspect the works as they progressed. He also made a point of arranging meetings between the members of the Board and the Sanitary Engineer whenever possible, so that every member may have a chance of satisfying himself as to the progress made and of setting his

doubts, if he had any, at rest. The following extract from the minutes of a meeting of 11th December 1926 gives an idea of Vallabhbhai's democratic and thorough method of work :

> "After welcoming the Sanitary Engineer of the Bombay Government, and the Executive Engineer of Ahmedabad, the President of the Municipality gave a brief account of the works that had been completed up to that date and of the work that was then in progress. He then requested the visitors to give the Board their opinion on the soundness or otherwise, both of the scheme and of the work that was being executed. In response to this invitation, the Sanitary Engineer stated that he had seen these works on several occasions and had an opportunity also of examining the scheme before the Government sanctioned it. On this occasion he had spent two days in inspecting the works very thoroughly, and had no hesitation in stating that the policy which the Board had followed was sound and that the Municipal Engineer had been carrying out the works in a satisfactory manner. He then answered such questions as were put to him."

In order to reduce the congestion in the city, Vallabhbhai encouraged the development of the Ellis Bridge and the Kankaria Planning Schemes. Simultaneos-ly, he pushed forward the scheme for the Kalupur relief road and for the demolition of the Fort wall. The two latter schemes aroused considerable opposition among the people. The former, the Kalupur relief road, was disliked by those whose buildings would have to be acquired for destruction ; a more disinterested opposition came from the Pols, peculiar to the city of Ahmedabad, some of which would be cut in two by the proposed road. The opposition to the proposal to demolish the Fort wall arose from a feeling that its disappearance would remove such protection as it afforded. Another and weightier, because disinterested argument was that the Fort was a memorial to the Muslim Sultans of Ahmedabad and was a fine specimen of the architecture of the time. A complete answer to all these points was : Had the critics an alternative to the demolition of the wall ? As there was none, if the problem of congestion was to be solved, the scheme had to be proceeded with in spite of the opposition. Both these schemes and the town planning scheme could, however, only be started during Vallabh-

bhai's tenure of office as President; they were completed gradually later.

In order that the people may take greater interest in the Government Civil Hospital and in the attached Medical School, and also with a view to acquiring popular control over them, Vallabhbhai asked the Government to hand over administration of the Hospital and the Medical School to the Municipality. After protracted correspondence, the Government declined to hand over the institutions to the Municipality, and yet if it had done so, it would only have acted in accordance with its own declared policy.

It had for long been Vallabhbhai's intention to establish at the site at which the memorable Congress Session of 1921 had been held, some memorial to that session. He wanted it, at the same time, to be something that will render useful service to the community. So he acquired 21 acres of land on the river bank at this site for the establishment of a general hospital and a maternity home, and obtained two donations, Rs 5½ lakhs from the trustees of Vadilal Sarabhai and Rs 1½ lakhs from Chunilal Chinai. Both these institutions were completed after Vallabhbhai left the Municipality.

Vallabhbhai met with some opposition during this period from a municipal officer, Shri Bhagat, who, indeed, became the immediate cause of Vallabhbhai's leaving the Municipality. That was no loss to Vallabhbhai, but it was a loss to Ahmedabad City. So far as Vallabhbhai was concerned, he became free thereby to take on work of greater and national importance. In 1925, Shri Bhagat had been appointed Chief Officer on probation. During that period he made serious allegations against the then Municipal Engineer, Shri Gore. As the Municipal Engineer was an officer of the same status as the Chief Officer, Vallabhbhai decided to conduct the inquiry himself. At his request the former President of the Municipality, Sir Ramanbhai, joined him in the inquiry. The inquiry showed conclusively that the charges made by Shri Bhagat were wholly without foundation. Bhagat's behaviour towards Gore was considered to be impertinent, hasty and ill-conceived. It was

recommended accordingly that Bhagat should be reprimanded for making charges which he could not substantiate. Bhagat's conduct in some other matters had also given cause for considerable dissatisfaction. His behaviour towards those subordinate to him as well as towards other officers of the Municipality was overbearing and inconsiderate. A large number of papers concerning Bhagat's previous record had disappeared from the Municipal archives. Thus there was no trace of an order of the Collector of Ahmedabad, Mr Chatfield, stopping Bhagat's increment for a period of time because of his disloyalty. More serious than all this was his attempt to create incidents which would exacerbate Muslim feeling. Taking account of all these matters and Bhagat's general conduct, Vallabhbhai came to the conclusion that Bhagat should not be confirmed in his appointmnt as Chief Officer. Bhagat immediately started his intrigues ; he tried to win for himself the support of all the Muslim members and of some nominated members. This led to his immediate removal from the post of Chief Officer. He was reverted to his permanent post of Personal Assistant to the Chief Officer. Vallabhbhai then arranged to borrow the services of an officer, Shri Shete, from the Bombay Corporation and appointed him as Chief Officer. In 1927, fresh elections of the Municipality took place. One of the newly nominated members, Seth Ambalal, organized a new party, to which he was successful in attracting some members of Vallabhbhai's party. This reduced Vallabhbhai's majority, with the result that when early in 1928, Shri Shete returned to Bombay on being appointed Deputy Commissioner of the Bombay Municipal Corporation, and the post of Chief Officer fell vacant and had to be filled, Bhagat succeeded in winning over sufficient support for himself. After considering the claims of all applicants, the choice was finally reduced to three candidates, H. L. Dewan, Morarji Desai *, who was then in Government service, and Bhagat. Vallabhbhai's party supported Dewan, while Seth Ambalal was opposed to him. As many members of Seth Ambalal's

* Now Chief Minister, Bombay.

party, however, did not favour Shri Bhagat, they decided as a party to remain neutral, leaving it to individual members to vote as they liked. The third party was in favour of Bhagat. As some members of Seth Ambalal's party voted for Bhagat, and the third party was solidly in his favour, Bhagat succeeded in getting a majority of one. Vallabhbhai had let it be known that if Bhagat was selected, he would leave the Municipality. As soon, therefore, as the result was known, he resigned from the Municipality. His resignation was accepted on a resolution moved by Seth Ambalal Sarabhai in the following terms :

> "In accepting the President's resignation with great regret, this Board wishes to assure him that he enjoys its complete confidence. It also places on record his great services to the Municipality."

Bardoli Satyagraha had commenced by this time, and it was becoming increasingly difficult for Vallabhbhai to attend satisfactorily both to his municipal responsibilities and to the rising tempo of the struggle in Bardoli. His release from municipal work was, therefore, in a sense most welcome.

In July 1927, as President of the Local Self-Government Conference, Vallabhbhai summed up in a brilliant speech the difficulties which Local Bodies had to face those days and the additional burdens which the Government imposed on them. Some extracts of general interest from this speech are given below :

> "There is a pressing need and demand for an adequate supply of pure filtered water, for good underground drainage, for the replacement of narrow and dirty lanes by broad, well-built roads, for well-lit and well-ventilated school-buildings, for playgrounds, for cleanliness, for good Municipal office buildings, for hospitals, for markets, for slaughter-houses and numerous other civic necessities. The Municipalities for the most part unfortunately are able to do little to meet these essential needs for want of financial resources."

* * *

> "The financial problem, the provision of adequate funds, constitutes the most important single hurdle for those who are responsible for administering local self-governing institutions. The problem has become particularly acute since the Reforms. Formerly, the responsibilities of Local Bodies were far fewer.

Owing to greater Government control then, the difficulties of Local Bodies were viewed with far more sympathy by officials and by the Government; the people tended, and rightly, to hold the Government responsible for whatever the Local Bodies did or failed to do. Moreover, the Local Self-Government Institutions at that time received financial assistance from the Government for every major work they undertook. The Government used to contribute its share regularly. All such assistance has virtually ceased after the Reforms. I would like to quote from my own experience of work in the Ahmedabad Municipality. We had obtained the Government's approval to a loan of Rs 45 lakhs for our water drainage schemes, and in accordance with the Government's professed policy, the Government ought to have assisted us to the extent of half of this expenditure. Our application has, however, been kept pending for the past 4 years! In Poona, the Government spent 16 lakhs of rupees in constructing a bridge as part of a Town Planning Scheme, even before the latter scheme itself was taken in hand! Following that analogy, the Ahmedabad Municipality prepared a not dissimilar Town Planning Scheme beyond Ellis Bridge and sent it up to the Government with the request that the Government should construct another bridge across the river Sabarmati on the same terms as in Poona. No reply has been vouchsafed to us for two years. The Ahmedabad Municipality has spent during the last three years lakhs of rupees on various projects and completed the construction of Municipal office buildings, rain-water and storm-drains, laboratories, and meat and vegetable markets. Nevertheless, it has so far not received, and has no hope of receiving, a single pie from the Government as its contribution towards this huge expenditure.

* * *

"In 1924, the Government directed that every Municipality should spend a sum equal to at least 4½ per cent of its total expenditure on medical relief, or should contribute an equivalent sum as grant to Government hospitals. The Government's real object was to extract money out of the Municipality and in order to cover up that object, the Government suggested that it was desirable for every Municipality to run its own hospital. The Government, it was said, would encourage such effort by giving suitable financial assistance. If any Municipality showed itself willing to take over the administration of a Civil Hospital, it was said that the Government would be willing to hand it over. The Ahmedabad Municipality accordingly asked that it should be allowed to run the local Civil Hospital. It prepared a suitable scheme and accepted most of the Government's conditions. The request was supported strongly by local officials, and yet after a protracted correspondence lasting over two years, the Government

finally turned down their request. Now the Municipality has prepared a scheme to start a hospital of its own and has asked for the Government's assistance in accordance with its announcement; it remains to be seen how far the Government responds. Because Local Self-Government is the responsibility of a non-official Minister, it receives but scant support from officials, and the institutions have to fend for themselves.

* * *

"The Minister for Local Self-Government has given the advice that large schemes should be taken up and financed from loans. He has not, however, indicated how the loans are to be obtained. Is the Government prepared to advance the necessary amounts? My experience so far has been bitterly disappointing. Last year, I asked the Government for a loan of 13½ lakhs at 5 per cent interest. As the Government is able to borrow money at 4 per cent, this would have left it a clear profit of 1 per cent. Nevertheless, the Government refused and we had to go to the market to borrow on our own credit.

* * *

"Our scheme for compulsory education is lying with the Government for the past 3 years! Whatever scheme we send up seems to be merely placed in a pigeon-hole, and if past experience is any guide, it does not look as if any of them will be dealt with in our life time.

* * *

"The Government keeps complaining of financial stringency. And yet there is considerable scope for effecting economies in its own expenditure but it seems to do nothing about it. After handing over responsibility for primary education to the Municipality, there would appear to be no need for maintaining a big Inspection staff. So far as I know there has been no retrenchment whatever among this category of officials. One begins to doubt the usefulness or the efficiency of an office which finds it difficult even to publish an account of work done by it after a time-lag of two years! The Government does not wish to give up its control over education although it itself is patently unable to spread education.

* * *

"The administrative charges of the P.W.D. appear to have risen enormously. In every District there is a hierarchy of officials, executive engineers, sub-divisional officers and overseers. As, however, the Government has no funds at its disposal to carry out any large projects, the organization is called upon to deal with the construction of only small buildings and scheme. Many Local Bodies are unable to maintain their own engineers. If the works of those bodies were to be executed by the Public Works

Department, even then the latter would have insufficient work to do. Nevertheless, if any Local Body asks the P.W.D. to carry out any of its work, it is called upon to pay 25 per cent administrative charges, over and above, the normal works cost!

* * *

"No longer is it possible, as before, to run a Municipality or a Local Body. Anyone who really wishes to discharge his duty properly will have to be prepared to devote all his time to it, and not as before an hour or two whenever convenient. He would not be able to go to Matheran or Mahabaleshwar for a change; he will have literally no time for rest."

CHAPTER XXV

THE FLOODS IN GUJARAT

In July 1927, in many parts of Gujarat and Kathiawad the rainfall was so heavy, so continuous, and was accompanied by such strong winds as had never before been known in the memory of the oldest living persons in those areas, and it almost literally razed to the ground the magnificent garden-land of Gujarat. On Saturday, the 23rd July, in the evening it began to rain heavily and continued incessantly until the 29th. On Sunday, everyone thought that heavy though the rainfall had been, it would stop in a short while. But not only did the rain not stop but from the evening of that day it was accompanied by heavy wind. It was then that the people began to realize that they were up against an extraordinary natural calamity. Vallabhbhai had also begun to be anxious from that evening. He could not sleep and went out at midnight to tour round the city. It was a dark night and the rain was literally pouring to the accompaniment of thunder and heavy wind. He walked along the Gandhi road. He felt that it would be wise to take someone with him. So he called on the way at the house of Harilal Kapadia, as it happened to be the nearest. Kapadia was a merchant and a brave man who would not hesitate to respond to any call for assistance in time of trouble. Kapadia opened the door himself, and before he could ask Vallabhbhai, who was drenched, why he was out at that

time, Vallabhbhai asked him to make some tea. Kapadia induced Vallabhbhai to change his clothes and then set about making tea. Vallabhbhai then said to him that it was necessary to make a tour of the city to see how different parts of the city were faring in so severe a storm. Kapadia's house was tall and open on three sides. The force of the rain and wind was so great that everybody inside felt that one or the other wall would collapse any moment. Nevertheless, Kapadia set out with Vallabhbhai on this midnight tour. Right until dawn, they moved about in the city ; and as Vallabhbhai felt that immediate steps would be necessary for the drainage and disposal of the rain water, he went straight to the Municipal Engineer's house, woke him up and proceeded to the municipal offices. From there, all the necessary men and officers were called and suitable instructions were given to them. From Monday evening houses started collapsing. In order that roads may not get blocked as a result, Vallabhbhai and the Municipal Engineer, Gore, toured almost continuously in the city for the next three or four days from morning to night and night to morning. Had they not done so, it is difficult to imagine what the condition of the city would have been. It is no exaggeration to say that but for the timely steps taken by Vallabhbhai, assisted by the engineering skill of Gore and his staff, the city would have had to undergo untold suffering and hardships.

All this time Vallabhbhai was greatly worried about the condition of the rest of Gujarat, but as the rain was continuous, and the trains had stopped running, the postal traffic had come to a standstill ; and as the telegraphic service was also thoroughly disorganized owing to telegraph wires being damaged at many places, it became virtually impossible to get any detailed or authoritative news from outside. This made it impossible to judge where and how to send assistance.

In Ahmedabad alone, 6,000 houses collapsed. Price of timber and other building materials and the wages of carpenters and masons shot up to incredible heights. Government officers and popular leaders could not hold the

prices within reasonable limits. Based on his own experience of the damage in Ahmedabad and on such meagre information as he could collect in regard to Gujarat and Kathiawad, Vallabhbhai issued an appeal in the *Navajivan* on the following Sunday.

> "The incessant and incredible rainfall of last week has plunged the whole of Gujarat and Kathiawad suddenly in a calamity. Several villages have been submerged or dragged away, and their inhabitants are believed to have taken refuge on high areas, and are without food or water. In the absence of post and telegraph and railway communications, it is not easy to obtain authoritative information of the damage done or of the lives lost, but judging from the severity of the damage done in Ahmedabad, one can form some idea of this terrible calamity.
>
> "In Ahmedabad, the average annual rainfall is estimated at 30 inches. There was 52 inches of rainfall during the last week. In Ahmedabad alone, thousands of people have been rendered homeless and have lost their property, movable and immovable. Many a worker and poor man must have been drowned, without leaving a trace. It is almost impossible to hazard a guess as to the condition of the village people, their fields and their cultivation.
>
> "It is not possible to obtain a true idea of the calamity until trains start running and telegraph service is restored. It is obvious, however, that the whole of Gujarat and Kathiawad is faced with a major calamity. Gujarat and Gujaratis living outside Gujarat have always donated freely for the relief of the distressed of other provinces. This is only to be expected of the charitably-minded Gujarat public. I am confident that they will not be behind-hand in giving generously on this occasion for the relief of their own kith and kin."

The Collector of Ahmedabad came to Vallabhbhai with a wire from the Bombay Government. At his request Vallabhbhai supplied him with the details of the flood havoc in Kheda District. The town of Kheda was surrounded by water and for miles around there was to be seen nothing but water. Kheda town was cut off completely from the rest of the District. There was acute shortage of foodgrains and other daily requirements and prices had shot up. The Collector of Kheda asked the Collector of Ahmedabad for help in securing a supply of these essential commodities. The Collector of Ahmedabad did not know what to do; the normal Government procedure did not permit rapid action. He placed his difficulties before Vallabhbhai, who immediately

obtained quantities of wheat, rice, sugar, kerosene etc., and sent them off to the Ahmedabad station, together with a group of volunteers. The Mamlatdar of Mehmadabad was told to see that things reached Kheda. The Collector of Kheda was greatly relieved when they arrived; and as he very thankfully acknowledged, for the poor these things came like a blessing from Heaven.

Vallabhbhai decided immediately to post volunteers at convenient centres in the whole of Gujarat so that relief could be sent, where necessary, to affected areas. He had at his disposal the service of a number of trained and experienced volunteers and workers who were familiar with every part of Gujarat. On the 29th the rain stopped and within four days volunteers were at their posts. They travelled by trains where possible or by road and got to villages, some of which were most inconveniently situated. To get to them, the volunteers had to walk through knee-deep and sometimes even waist-deep water and mud. At times they had to cross small rivers and rivulets which they swam or crossed with the assistance of inflated bags. They started sending back detailed reports of the damage done after seeing conditions for themselves. In many a place people had lost everything, their homes, their household goods, their cattle and their cultivation. Many had survived by clinging to trees. Some had found more comfortable shelter on top of public buildings, such as Dharmashalas and houses which had survived. The people of the villages which were situated in low-lying areas and were wholly submerged, had necessarily to seek shelter on the branches of trees. As water kept rising, people kept moving to higher spots and where they had time, they made themselves a trifle more comfortable by tying their cots and beds to trees and took shelter on them with their families. Those who were caught wholly unawares had to seek shelter where they could find it. Cattle were set free so that they might save themselves. Even on trees, where people went without food for at times as many as five days, they could not have peace; for many other creatures and animals also sought the shelter of trees. Thus, snakes, too, left their holes and

clung to trees. But face to face with angry Nature, even the snakes became gentle. In many a place, people lived together with otherwise dangerous creatures for several days. On the bank of the river Dhadhar, in a little village of 7 cottages there lived 61 Bhils. The village had a Samdi tree and two small Nim trees. On these trees, these 61 persons climbed up and remained. For four days, the people were able to continue in this manner but on the fifth day, children and old people started falling down through sheer exhaustion and were dragged away by the current. In this way, 31 out of the 61 lives were lost. In a village of Dholka Taluka, 18 persons, small and big, were carried away. Many accounts were received of brave people who had, at the risk of their own lives, saved many others. A District Traffic Superintendent of the local Railway and a Talukdar of Dholka Taluka were known to have saved between them nearly 50 people.

In spite of such a terrible calamity, the people did not become demoralized or helpless. They started taking steps to save their villages as soon as they could make some make-shift arrangements for their families. Everyone vied with everyone else in doing what he could to help his neighbours and his neighbouring villages. People forgot caste differences and Harijans were given shelter and were fed by high caste people in their homes and in public buildings. In most villages the Harijans suffered perhaps the most. Ordinarily their homes are situated some distance away from the village and in many places they were cut off from the village altogether. As their mud houses and huts could not stand against such a storm, many of them had to spend days and nights sitting on the 'mounds' created by their fallen down cottages! The villagers did what they could to bring them into the village to their own houses and Dharmashalas and looked after them. In a few places, it so happened that the Harijan houses were located in higher areas and there the position was reversed. The higher caste villagers had then to go and take shelter in Harijan areas. Just as Harijans and Caste Hindus forgot their man-made distinctions, so also were forgotten the distinctions between

Hindus and Muslims. In many a place, Muslims were given shelter in Hindu and Jain temples and one Muslim Fakir lived for a number of days in a Shankar's temple. In a particularly orthodox temple, Muslims and Harijans were allowed to go right inside and take shelter. For years Gandhiji had been preaching this lesson to Gujarat and it seemed as if it had at last found acceptance ! Indeed, one might say that the one great redeeming feature of this calamity was the human friendliness, mutual help and self-help which was evident everywhere in the affected areas.

After a time it became possible to determine precisely the areas of Gujarat and Kathiawad which had been flooded out. In the North, the area round about Sidhpur, Patan, Bhalusana, Satlasan and other villages up to Jhinjhuwad, were seriously affected, though further north right up to Palanpur, there had been somewhat less devastating floods ; in the West, the land beyond Wadhwan upto Dhrangadhra, Muli, Sayla and Chuda, was destroyed while the effect of the floods had been felt as far up as Wankaner and Rajkot ; in the South, the limit of the flood may be said to be the River Narmada, and in the East, beyond Godhra up to Piplod great losses had been suffered. But the calamity hit the Kheda District the hardest, and the land around Baroda. Many charitable organizations joined hands with the Gujarat Congress Committee in flood relief, but everywhere the work was done under the guidance and in accordance with the procedure and principles laid down by Vallabhbhai. He received a generous measure of financial assistance from a number of mercantile houses of Ahmedabad and Bombay. As soon as the communications were restored, many generous rich men came forward to help in the troubled areas. A number of them wanted to give assistance in the shape of food and clothing with their own hands but they were only able to get up to villages in the neighbourhood of railway stations and of the main roads. The result was that these villages received entirely disproportionate assistance. As the real object of their generosity was not being served in this manner, Vallabhbhai requested these people to remit the money they

wished to donate, to the Congress Committees. Those who nevertheless wished to hand out their gifts themselves, were advised to take the trouble to do so in places to which they would be directed by the local workers.

As soon as the workers had covered the entire affected area, and afforded immediate assistance to all those who stood most in need, Vallabhbhai called a meeting at Anand on the 11th of August of all the workers in order to devise a scheme to assist the peasants and other classes to resettle themselves. The policy laid down at this meeting governed the work of relief and rehabilitation in the flood-affected areas, and what the volunteers were able to achieve throughout Gujarat with the aid of this policy was indeed remarkable. These achievements and efforts may be summed up under the following heads:

1. Those who were rendered completely homeless were given free food and clothes. They were, however, not encouraged to rely upon such assistance for a moment longer than was necessary. All who could cultivate and who had land were given assistance until the new crop came in, while those who were not agriculturists were given assistance in return for work of various kinds, such as road repair. Naturally, the very old, the infirm and the very young were exempted from work. In very badly affected and poverty-stricken areas it was necessary to give assistance of this nature for as long as three months, but in most other places, no assistance was necessary after the first two months.

2. Vallabhbhai was insistent that even the smallest piece of land which was cultivable should be cultivated. In the main it was possible to sow only Jowar for cattle and for this it was necessary to arrange a supply of seeds. As there was a shortage of seeds, there was every reason to fear that their price will shoot up. The Government had about 1,000 maunds of seeds which it had purchased at Rs 4/12 a maund and which it was not prepared to sell at a lower price. The District Congress Committee arranged to purchase seed where it could be found through a special sub-committee. On the average its purchases were made at the rate of Rs 3/12/- a maund and the seeds were sold to the agriculturists at Rs 3 a maund, thus giving them a relief of 12 annas per maund. Some 30,000 maunds of seeds were thus sold. Encouraged by their success in the distribution of Jowar seeds, the committee went on to arrange for the sale of winter seeds also, mainly wheat and gram. In all some 80,000 maunds of seeds of all kinds were sold

at concessional rates. An incidental gain which accrued through the sale of good quality seeds was that permanent improvement was achieved in the quality of the grains in the whole area. The Government had given to the agriculturists Taqavi for the purchase of seeds. It was arranged that no one should be given cash but only authority to obtain seeds of a given value from the Congress Committee. By this method the agriculturists who were inclined foolishly to use up their Taqavi for a purpose other than that for which it was given were prevented from doing so and utilized the money for purchasing seeds at a cheap rate.

3. Those who lost their bullocks and had no means to replace them were given loans for their purchase. Practically the entire loan given was later duly recovered.

4. Cheap grain and cotton seed shops were opened in order that prices in the area may not shoot up. There was a large sale of foodgrains as well as of cotton seeds. The loss suffered on this account was small, only Rs 52,000.

5. In a number of places corpses of cattle were lying about and were decomposing. Similarly, much foodgrain which had been stored had got spoilt. They gave out very bad smell. The teachers and students of the Sabarmati Ashram and of the Gujarat Vidyapith took over the responsibility of disposing of both the decomposing corpses and the deteriorating foodgrains. They dug water-channels in order to drain away stagnant pools of water, and where it was not possible to do so, they put disinfectants in the pools. They removed many cart-loads of dirt and filth and cleaned up many an evil smelling area.

6. In the month Bhadarwa *, practically everywhere in the country there is fever. On this occasion there broke out an epidemic of diarrhoea. The workers distributed medicines in the villages for the prevention of fever and diarrhoea. Thus epidemics of all kinds were averted and nothing untoward happened in Gujarat. On the 26th August 1925, *The Times of India* in an article wrote that the floods in Gujarat had not resulted in any falling off in the general standard of public health. "For this Gujarat deserves to be congratulated." On the 30th October a correspondent reported that in no part of the affected area had the death rate gone up as compared to the previous years.

7. In addition to foodgrains, seeds and medicines, clothes also were distributed free; and the very poor who were rendered homeless were also provided some place to live in.

* The last but one month of the year, according to the Hindu calendar. It comes at the end of the rainy season, and just precedes the onset of winter.

Compared to the speed and zeal with which Vallabhbhai acted on this occasion, the Government appeared to move at snail's pace. Eight days after the rain stopped, the District Collector ordered the Taluka officers to prepare registers of losses. The Commissioner of the Northern Division was in Poona at the time of the floods, and he returned to Ahmedabad on the 4th of August. Thereafter he approved of the free gift to every Taluka of Rs 2,000 and of Rs 15,000 as Taqavi loan. If the preparation of statements of losses was to proceed as other Government work normally does, so much delay would have occurred that by the time relief began to be distributed, many of the affected people would have been dead and buried. Vallabhbhai suggested to the Commissioner, therefore, that he should not treat this calamity as a minor one. "You may not worry yourself about giving relief in regard to foodstuffs and other immediate necessities. It is clear, however, that the people will need a great deal of money in order to bring their land once again under cultivation and to rebuild their homes." Therefore, he requested the Bombay Government to make available an adequate sum of money for flood relief out of the Famine Relief Fund which at that time amounted to about Rs 2½ crores. The provincial Accountant-General, however, pointed out that the Fund was for famine relief whereas this was flood relief and that, therefore, the money could not be used for the purpose. Fortunately, the Finance Member of the Bombay Government, Sir Chunilal Mehta, after visiting Nadiad personally and discussing the situation with the local Government officers as well as with the workers engaged in flood relief, was able to appreciate the position better and gave an assurance that money would be found.

The calamity was of an abnormal nature and the problems created were, therefore, very difficult and varied. The work of relief was organized with a skill which matched the difficulty of the problem. The Governor of Bombay himself toured the whole of Gujarat for a week from 8th September to 15th September. He visited many villages and flood relief centres and endeavoured to obtain

an idea of the real condition of the people by talking freely to them. When he realized the extent and the nature of their troubles, he gave them the assurance that the Government would give appropriate assistance. He also praised the courage and skill with which the agriculturists of Gujarat had worked to protect themselves and their property during this calamity. He expressed his amazement at the energy with which the agriculturists had set about their task. What surprised him most was the rapidity with which the entire flood relief organization had come into being under Vallabhbhai's guidance, the moment the rains had stopped. It was significant that no one complained to the Governor of shortage of food or of clothing, or asked for any relief for essential needs. All that they asked for was loans at low rates of interest in order to enable them to restart cultivation and to re-build their homes.

On the 20th of September, His Majesty the King Emperor announced a donation of Rs 2,000/- for flood relief work and the Secretary of State for India, Lord Birkenhead, contributed a sum of £ 10 to the fund. These were token gifts in indication of the sympathy that the great calamity had aroused generally.

The people, in the meantime, were getting anxious to know the conditions on which the Government proposed to give them loans for the construction of buildings etc. Vallabhbhai had been 'prodding' Government all the time. At last the Government invited Vallabhbhai and Thakkar Bapa, together with the members of the Bombay Central Flood Relief Committee, to Poona to consider a scheme for this purpose. This meeting was held on the 27th of September in Sir Chunilal Mehta's house and a draft of the conditions for loans was agreed upon. A committee consisting of a Government official and a representative of the Congress Provincial Committee was to determine the amount of loan to be given on the basis of an estimate of the loss incurred by each individual applicant. In the event of a difference of opinion between the two members, the final decision would rest with a committee of a superior Government official and Thakkar Bapa. It was further

decided that a sum of Rs 1,30,00,000/- would be made available for loans of this nature. Each loan was not to exceed Rs 2,000/- and was to be repaid within 10 years at the most. The minimum annual instalment was to be Rs 20/-. It was further decided to set aside a sum of ten lakhs out of which deserving poorer members of the backward classes were to be given non-repayable grants. The maximum amount of such free grants, however, was not to exceed Rs 50/- in any case. The Government approved of this draft finally on the 30th.

The Central Flood Relief Committee had been constituted in Bombay on the 3rd of August immediately the rains ceased. It collected a sum of Rs 13½ lakhs. Several schemes were drawn up for granting relief out of this amount but as the work of relief had already been organized by the Gujarat Provincial Committee and all the money that they needed for their work had already been collected by that committee, it was not necessary to draw upon the Bombay Central Fund. In order to avoid any misunderstanding in the minds of the donors of the fund, a joint statement was issued over the signatures of Sir Purushottamdas Thakurdas and Vallabhbhai, explaining that all the immediate relief in the shape of foodgrains, clothing, seeds and medicines, had been given in sufficient quantities to all who stood in need of it. Now the next task was for the reconstruction of the affected areas. For the rebuilding of houses, the Government had already announced its policy of assistance and in accordance with that people would receive loans or free grants as the case may be. But the poorer members of the middle classes who were not in a position to offer any kind of security could not receive assistance from the Government. It was therefore decided that grants might be made from the Central Fund. In addition, assistance was to be given from that fund to make good the damage that had been sustained by public places, such as Dharmashalas, temples, masjids, library buildings, Harijan wells etc., as also for the re-establishment of the village itself, if necessary, on a fresh plot of ground. The statement further explained that the actual disbursement of the money would

be done by the workers of the District Committee. It seemed entirely unnecessary to send other people for this purpose, on behalf of the Central Fund, even if it were possible to find other men of equal experience and calibre and knowledge of local conditions.

In order that the fullest benefit out of the financial assistance thus given might accrue to the people and to cut out middlemen's profit, the Provincial Committee organized shops for the retail sale of building materials. This work was carried out with great honesty and skill by a sub-committee. To prevent temptation to use up money for purposes for which it was not intended, the distribution of the loan money and of the free gifts both on behalf of the Government and of the Central Fund was made partly in cash and partly in the shape of authority on the committee's official shops for building materials. In Kheda District alone, Rs 18 lakhs worth of material was sold under such authority, and material worth almost Rs 8 lakhs was sold against cash at the official shops. It was estimated that the resultant advantage to the people was of the order of 20 to 25 per cent on the ordinary retail price.

The entire work of relief was carried out without any distinction of caste or creed. When, however, some disturbances occurred between Hindus and Muslims, certain Muslims alleged that they were not receiving proper assistance from the committee and asked for separate relief. This led to a visit to Kheda District by a committee of enquiry, composed of Ibrahimbhai Karimbhai and Lakshmidas Rowji Tersi. After examining the registers of relief at various centres, such as Nadiad, Kheda, Matar, and Mehmadabad, and making enquiries, the committee were satisfied that there had been no discrimination whatever. Indeed, they discovered that the Muslims and Christians had received far more assistance than was their due, considering the proportion which they bore to the total population. They also found that the Muslim Relief Committee of the District had not been maintaining proper accounts, nor did it distribute relief in accordance with any definite system. Nevertheless, in order to remove all doubts

on the subject, the Provincial Committee appointed Imam Saheb of the Satyagraha Ashram to go in detail into the complaints of the Muslims.

Vithalbhai was at this time the President of the Central Legislature. As soon as he heard of the floods in Gujarat, he was most anxious to go to Gujarat to render whatever assistance he could. He started immediately a flood relief fund of his own. As soon as the session of the Legislature was over, he left Simla and arrived in Nadiad on the 27th September and announced that he had come to work under Vallabhbhai Patel, the President of the Gujarat Provincial Committee. From the very next day, he started touring in the flood affected areas. He concentrated his attention on the areas where heavy damage had been caused and larger assistance was necessary. In many a place, rivers had carried away whole fields. It was necessary to give assistance to the owners of such fields. In some places, acre after acre of cultivable land was covered over with 5 to 10 feet of river sand, so that it could not have been brought under cultivation for years; in yet other places, wells in fields neighbouring the river banks, were filled with sand from the river. Vithalbhai drew pointed attention of the Government to damage of this character and invited the Viceroy to visit the flood affected area and see things for himself. In response to this, the Viceroy and Lady Irwin came to Gujarat for a two-day visit on the 11th December. One of the two days, he spent in Ahmedabad District and the other in Kheda District, and visited as many centres in the two Districts as possible. On the 12th evening, Vithalbhai gave a garden party in honour of the Viceroy at Nadiad and invited to it all the principal workers, as well as the Members of the Legislatures from Gujarat. In a speech which he made on this occasion, the Viceroy said: "From what I have seen and heard I am satisfied that if the volunteers of the Gujarat Provincial Committee had not arrived in the flood affected areas in time, the loss of life instead of being negligible would have been very heavy. The credit for preventing such a calamity goes to the volunteers of the Provincial Congress Committee."

In the very low lying areas, a number of villages had been carried away during the floods and they had to be re-established at other and better situated places. Maganlal Gandhi planned to rebuild one such village of 104 houses by name Dantawa in a scientific way. The foundation stone of this village was laid by Vithalbhai and the village was re-named Vithalpur. Five or six such villages were rebuilt in this planned, scientific manner.

Throughout this period Gandhiji was in Bangalore, convalescing from his illness. Some people requested him to come to Gujarat at this time of its distress. Gandhiji immediately asked Vallabhbhai telegraphically if he was required. To this Vallabhbhai replied: "If you wish to give us an opportunity to show you how well we have learnt what you have taught us and how we are putting into practice the training that you have been giving to us for the past 10 years, do not come." Gandhiji accepted this advice and satisfied himself with keeping up almost continuous correspondence with Vallabhbhai and other workers. His articles in the *Navajivan* gave courage and solace to the people and guidance to the volunteer workers. In appealing for funds he wrote:

> "Proud Gujarat is laid low and she who has hitherto filled the beggars' bowl is now obliged to take the bowl herself. I have had up to now nothing to go by except the newspaper reports. Though Shri Vallabhbhai Patel was preparing me for the worst through his private wires he was unable to give details. I give below his telegram just received on my return from Hassan:
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> 'Most part of Gujarat North of Narmada and Kathiawad devastated. People rendered homeless. Cattle and belongings washed away. Total damage in crores. Loss of life small except in Baroda. Kheda District is worst with 100 inches of rain. Borsad still isolated. Piteous appeals for help coming from all parts of Gujarat and Kathiawad. Public meeting was held on August 2nd, Relief Committee formed. Three lakhs for food relief Ahmedabad District and ten lakhs for advancing loans reconstruction of houses to be raised. Provincial relief to be separately conducted under Prantik Samiti. Relief centres have been opened under Amritlal Thakkar, Lakshmidas Purushottam and Narahari Parikh respectively at Anand, Nadiad and Mehmadabad. Maganlal Gandhi will reach Borsad and establish communications. Other centres are also

being reached and relief operations started. Amritlal Sheth is trying to reach areas of Kathiawad and is organizing relief. The immediate problem is one of saving life by the timely supply of foodstuffs. Local resources are inadequate. Pray issue a general appeal to all India for succour without delay.'

"Shri Fulchand Shah sends a detailed wire from Nadiad about Kheda. Dr. Chandulal of Bharuch sends an angry wire asking me what I intend doing towards the relief of the distress in Gujarat. I have been dumbstruck by the newspaper reports. Those who know anything of the devastating floods in the South can somewhat realize what a howling wilderness parts of Gujarat must have become. Kheda owes its fertility to the industry of its resourceful farmers. It is no joke for them to find the whole of their crops washed away and their fields stinking with the stench of the carcasses of their valuable and splendid cattle.

"I know that no human effort can possibly make up for the loss of crores' worth of crops, cattle and belongings, together with rich manure washed away into the ocean, but human sympathy can do much to relieve the mental agony of the people who have lost their all. I do hope that all who see this appeal and who can will send their mite toward relief.

"Shri Patel is a seasoned soldier and has no other occupation than that of service. He has got an efficient agency of workers under him. Donors need, therefore, have no fear of wasteful expense or misappropriation. Properly audited accounts will be published, and all sums received will be acknowledged in the columns of *Young India* and if necessary *Navajivan*. Relief work will be done by him in collaboration with other agencies that may be brought into being. The chief thing is to send help. Let the donor choose his favourite and most trusted agency, but let him make sure that he sends not the least but the most he can."

In another article addressed to students, he said:

"I am overjoyed at the magnificent contribution which students are making by their personal assistance in the flood relief work. I hope that no student, man or woman, allows the thought to cross his mind even for a moment that it was a mistake to have got mixed up in this work at the cost of his or her studies. If such an idea occurs to them at all, it means that the service they are rendering is being rendered, not because they are convinced it is their duty to render it, but because of social pressure. To that extent their service is incomplete."

In order to prevent people from becoming greedy, and to see that volunteer workers did their work carefully and with a sense of responsibility, he offered a number of very valuable suggestions:

"One must guard against giving relief to the more powerful and leaving out the poor. I have heard of a few inspiring cases of people who refused to take assistance, even though they needed it badly. But I know also from my experience on previous occasions that there are many who take assistance because it is being given, even though they may not need it. It is essential, therefore, not to give, whether through a false idea of kindness or through fear or through pressure, a single pie to anybody who does not need it. This is at least as essential as to see that whoever is in need of relief, is given assistance at any cost.

"At a time of such terrible distress, men become generous and are inclined to give to whosoever asks for assistance. I do not believe that by giving thus in an unplanned manner, we do any good. The ordinary rule should be that everyone should be prepared to face the misfortunes which befall him. If everyone tries to carry his own burdens, we shall find that there are few indeed who are unable to do so. Many however become a burden to others and are able to obtain assistance to a greater extent than they deserve. Free assistance, therefore, to be most effective, should be given only for a short while. After that our duty is to tell them what they should do to help themselves. Those who are hale and hearty and are not disabled in any way, should then not stand in need of further assistance."

In writing about reconstruction, he said:

"After great calamities, a new world is inevitably created. Even if it is perhaps not proper to describe this particular disaster as a very great calamity in that sense, still it is of the same variety. If volunteer workers are intelligent and patient, they should be able to build a new world. They would encourage villagers to give up their evil habits and induce them to think in terms of something better when rebuilding their homes and their villages. Where areas are liable to flood frequently, villages should be removed and established in other places. But this is not work which can be done by anyone individually. It calls for guidance and assistance from the Government. My request here is addressed to Vallabhbhai and his band of workers."

Gandhiji's suggestions made a very deep impression on the workers and every effort was made to ensure that the work of relief and reconstruction was carried out in a planned manner.

When he presented the statement of expenditure in connection with the flood relief to the Legislature, Sir Chunilal Mehta, the Finance Member, greatly praised Vallabhbhai's alertness and organizing ability and said that

in Gandhiji's absence, Vallabhbhai had taken his place and discharged his duties creditably. He also admitted that the discipline and the ability which the volunteer workers had shown was the result of years of training given to them by Gandhiji and Vallabhbhai.

The Government had appointed a Mr Garret as special officer for flood relief work. He came in fairly close contact with the principal workers. At that time the general impression among the Government officials was that the non-co-operationists thought only in terms of organizing disturbances and agitations against the Government. But they knew of Vallabhbhai's work in the Municipality and indeed many among them had become his close friends. On this occasion, all the workers co-operated whole-heartedly with the Government officials and impressed them with their organizing ability and devotion to duty. Mr Garret once asked Vallabhbhai if he would object to his recommending to the Government that some honours or titles should be conferred on him and his colleagues as a mark of appreciation for the creditable work they had done. Vallabhbhai burst out laughing and replied that his colleagues would not care for such honours and titles. "Their delight is in doing service to the people and they are not anxious for publicity or fame."

Vallabhbhai and his workers had undertaken this work because of their love of the people and for their own satisfaction. They were all, moreover, anxious not to let down Gandhiji who lay ill in Bangalore and suffered mental torture at the thought of the calamity which had befallen the people of Gujarat. They were determined to do everything possible to prove a credit to the training which they had received at his hands. No voluntary worker hesitated to carry out unquestioningly whatever orders he received and Vallabhbhai also had no hesitation in calling upon them all to shoulder great responsibilities and heavy work. He gave every worker whatever he needed for discharging his duty adequately. Those who were placed in charge of a centre, were given as if blank cheque books. If Vallabhbhai received even a letter written in pencil from them at mid-

night, he would immediately get up and take steps to see that they were sent whatever they required. He and they had only one idea, viz. that no one in the flood-affected area should go without food, or die of cold for want of clothing, or any land remain uncultivated for want of seeds or agricultural instruments. This desire of theirs was fulfilled to the letter, and in addition, a creditable beginning in the task of scientific rebuilding of houses and villages was made.

CHAPTER XXVI

SATYAGRAHA OF BARDOLI

Section I

After the Congress Session of 1921 at Ahmedabad, when it was decided not to start the Civil Disobedience Movement in the Bardoli Taluka, and particularly after Gandhiji was arrested, Vallabhbhai planned with the assistance of his colleagues to continue the constructive work in that Taluka with vigour, so that Bardoli might be ready for Civil Disobedience activities whenever a decision was taken to start them. In spite of the fact that the political atmosphere had gradually cooled so much so that despair seemed to be overtaking the political workers, Vallabhbhai went forward with his plans. He established in different parts of the Taluka experienced workers and kept alive in the minds of the people the fact that Gandhiji had selected that particular area for his experiment of Satyagraha. At last in 1928 when the opportunity arose of challenging the Government on the question of the increase of land revenue assessment, Vallabhbhai was ready to welcome it and organized Satyagraha so successfully that it had an almost electrifying effect on the entire country and inspired the people with fresh hope and enthusiasm.

It was the practice in the Bombay Presidency to enquire into the economic circumstances of the agriculturists every 30 years and on the basis of such enquiries to make suitable adjustments in the land revenue assessment. The last

survey of this kind was carried out in Bardoli Taluka in 1896, so that in the ordinary way, the revision should have taken place in 1926. A Deputy Collector of Surat at the time, Shri Jayakar, was appointed Assessment Officer. He recommended (i) an increase of 25 per cent in the current land revenue rates and (ii) the transfer of 23 villages from the lower category to a higher category for purposes of assessment, with the result that these villages had to bear a simultaneous increase on two fronts, the higher assessment of the upper class and the overall increase in the assessment. In this way, the land revenue assessment of the whole Taluka was increased by 30 per cent. The current land revenue assessment of the Taluka increased as a result from Rs 5,14,762 to Rs 6, 72,273. The reasons for recommending this increase were said to be the following :

1. Construction of several fresh macadamized roads and the opening of the broad gauge line of the Tapti Valley Railway;
2. Increase of 3800 in the population;
3. Increase in the number of milch cattle, bullock carts and agricultural implements;
4. Increase in the number of well-built buildings;
5. Improvement in the condition of Kaliparaj * as a result of education and temperance activity;
6. Abnormal increase in prices of foodgrains and cotton;
7. Increase in the wages of agricultural labour by a 100 %;
8. Steady increase in the value of lease money and in the prices of land; and
9. Increase in the value of the crops at 1924 prices by Rs 15 lakhs as compared with the value of the crop on the basis of prices prevailing 30 years ago.

A sub-committee was appointed to prepare a reply to this report. After a careful study of the report and after a tour of the whole Taluka, the committee collected evidence and other data to disprove the statements made in the Settlement Officer's report. The Chairman of this committee in a series of articles in the *Navajivan* criticized the Land Settlement Officer's report in detail and proved by facts and figures that the reasons given for the increase were all invalid.

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* A backward class community.

For many years, popular leaders as well as some Government officers had been criticizing the land revenue assessment system of the Government on the ground that it was not being determined in accordance with any settled principles. To meet this criticism, the Government had announced in 1902 in a detailed note that the land revenue assessment should never exceed 50 per cent of the net profit of cultivation. This basis was so severely criticized that in 1924 the Government of Bombay felt it necessary to appoint another committee. This committee recommended by a majority that the land revenue assessment should be equal to 25 per cent of the net profit of the agriculturists. The Government did not accept the recommendation of the majority and instead decided to adhere to the current policy of taking 50 per cent of the net profit. The moot point, however, was how to decide the net profit. On the whole, agriculture is not a profitable business and if people adhere to agriculture it is only because they have no alternative. It is the one occupation in which millions of people get work and even though they are under-nourished, impoverished and indebted, are able somehow or other to obtain a livelihood.

At that time the Settlement Commissioner was a Mr Anderson. It was his view that in a country like India, the method of cultivation, the system of agricultural wages and other matters varied so much from place to place that it was extremely difficult to determine what the agriculturist spent on cultivation. And if it was not possible to determine the cost of cultivation, clearly it would not be possible to determine the net profit of cultivation. Therefore, he concluded that the rate at which land could be leased out should be regarded as net profit. He was quite satisfied that the land revenue assessment should be increased but he felt that the reasons put forward by Mr Jayakar were not conclusive. His main criticism of Shri Jayakar's report was as follows :

"He did not consider that the argument of increase in the value of the crops obtainable from the land in question was of any special significance, because if at the same time the cost of

cultivating the land had also increased either by an equivalent amount or by a greater amount, there would be no justification for an increase in the land revenue assessment. Indeed, if the cost of cultivation had increased by a higher amount, there would be a case for a reduction. It is clear, therefore, that for the purpose of land revenue assessment, the cost of cultivation, value of the output and the prevailing prices are all irrelevant. The land revenue assessment should be based on the rental value and rental value alone."

Anderson, thus, discarded the whole of Jayakar's report. At the same time, he accepted the appendices prepared by Jayakar of sales and rentals as accurate. These appendices were found subsequently to have been prepared carelessly and to be full of mistakes. In the interpretation of these figures, such as they were, Anderson made a big mistake. He calculated wrongly that 43,000 acres out of the total area in the Taluka of 1,27,000 acres, were being leased out; that is roughly one-third of the land in the Taluka was being leased. By adding to this land which was being cultivated on the system of half share and on other bases, he concluded that quite half the land in the Taluka was being leased out. Mr Jayakar's figures related to rentals during the past seven years only and the total amount of land which had been given on lease during that whole period came to no more than 42,923 acres. From this it would appear that annually only 6,000 acres were being leased out. On the basis of this wrong calculation, however, Anderson recommended that the land revenue assessment should be increased by 29 per cent.

The Government had, thus, before it two conflicting reports. In July 1927, the Government issued an order accepting the new classification of villages as recommended by the Settlement Commissioner and also the argument of the increased value of the crops advanced by the Settlement Officer. Instead of 29 per cent increase recommended by the Settlement Commissioner and the 30 per cent increase by the Settlement Officer, the Government decided upon an increase of 22 per cent on the ground that some account should be taken of the probable fall in the prices of cotton in the near future.

The peoples' case in regard to the arguments advanced in the two reports was as follows :

(1) The Settlement Commissioner, Anderson, had prepared his report in his office without once visiting the Taluka, while the Settlement Officer, Jayakar, had made his recommendations after visiting the principal villages of the Taluka in a superficial way without meeting or discussing the question with the local people or giving the local people any opportunity to put forward their point of view.

(2) Jayakar had suggested the alteration of the classification of some of the villages on the ground that they had benefited from the Tapti Valley Railway and this was supported by Anderson. But both had forgotten that in 1896, the then Settlement Officer had taken into account the benefits likely to be derived from that railway and this he had admitted clearly in his report :

> "I learn from the Agent of the B. B. & C. I. Railway that the construction of the line may be begun about this time next year. At any rate, it may be safely assumed that five years hence Bardoli will be in railway communication with Surat; and as the revision settlement, when introduced, will be guaranteed for 30 years, we shall be justified in giving the projected railway its due weight."

(3) It is scarcely worth commenting on the so-called new macadamized roads of Bardoli Taluka. Even today in 1950, the so-called macadamized roads are scarcely superior to the village tracks. Some years ago, a Settlement Officer had written that these roads were enough to break the heart of man and beast, and that better roads should be built in the Taluka, because it was a Taluka which paid quite large sums in land revenue assessment. Nevertheless, up to 1926, no really good road had been constructed in the Taluka.

(4) Is an increase of 3,800 in the population of a Taluka in a period of 30 years of any significance ?

(5) While it is true that there was a small increase in the number of buffaloes, Jayakar himself admitted in his report that there had been a decrease in the number of bullocks.

(6) The brick and mortar buildings were for the most part constructed by those who had made money in Africa.

(7) Was it proper to increase the land revenue assessment by 22 per cent because the people themselves helped, through their own activities, in propagating the temperance movement and in increasing the education facilities for the backward class people ? In fact, the burden of debt on these people was steadily increasing and they were losing their lands.

(8) Although the prices of agricultural commodities had risen after 1918 as a result of the war, they had started declining since 1925.

(9) The cost of cultivation had increased not by 100 per cent but by 400 per cent. A pair of bullocks instead of costing Rs 100/- as before, cost in 1925-26 Rs 400/-. Bullock carts instead of costing Rs 50/- to Rs 75/- cost Rs 150/-, while agricultural labour who used to work for Rs 30/- for the season could not now be had for less than Rs 200-300/-.

(10) In the year after the war the prices of land had undoubtedly gone up but it was found on investigation of sales in different villages that the great majority of these sales were made to people who had come back after earning money abroad. In the Settlement Report there was not even a mention of the fact that a good deal of the wealth of the Taluka was derived from these foreign earnings.

(11) In the instances of leases, quoted in the report, care should have been taken to include only pure leases and to exclude leases which included other elements, such as mortgages, in which the interest was regarded as lease money, or an increase in lease money conceded because the owner himself had manured the land or effected other improvements, or a cultivator having taken a field on a higher lease money because it adjoined his own field. The Settlement Officer, however, had made no such enquiry.

The special committee appointed by the Bardoli Taluka Congress Committee brought out all these points and showed that not only was an increase not reasonable but even the current rate of assessment was too high. Under the leadership of the local Members of the Legislature the committee went in deputation before the Revenue Member.

After the Government Resolution was published, the agriculturists of the Taluka held a meeting and decided not to pay the enhanced amount. All this, however, had no effect. Orders were issued by the Government to the Talatis to collect the revised assessment.

Section II

In such circumstances what were the people to do ? Not knowing what they should do, the people went to Vallabhbhai. He replied that it was not right for him to intervene so long as the Members of the Legislature were guiding them. When the latter told the people that there was nothing further they could do to assist them, the people went once again to Vallabhbhai. This time he saw them along with the Secretary of the Congress Committee, and other workers of the Bardoli Taluka. Vallabhbhai listened to them patiently, gave them some hope and said, "You go back to Bardoli. If the agriculturists are prepared to withhold not merely the increase in the land revenue but the whole of the land revenue, and if they are prepared to face all the dire consequences, that will undoubtedly ensue, I am willing to come. Go through the whole Taluka, ascertain what the people have to say. Find out how many are ready and then tell me." This was round about the 20th of January. The first instalment of the land revenue fell due on the 5th of February, so that the whole of the enquiry had to be completed in the course of 8 to 10 days. The workers of the Taluka travelled throughout the Taluka night and day and having ascertained the views of the people returned to Ahmedabad. All of them, accompanied by Vallabhbhai, went to Gandhiji, to whom Vallabhbhai said that he had examined the whole case and was satisfied that the cause was just. As soon as Gandhiji learnt that Vallabhbhai had made up his mind, he said, "Well, then, there is nothing more to be considered. Go forward and victory to Gujarat."

On the 4th February Vallabhbhai arrived in Bardoli. He presided on that very day over a conference of agriculturists of the whole Taluka. The conference was attended by small and large agriculturists from some 80 villages. After a very thorough cross-examination, Vallabhbhai

warned them solemnly in his public speech in the following terms :

> "I shall stand by the side of anyone who is prepared to take risks. In 1921 we were on the point of being put to the test but unforeseen circumstances intervened and we had no opportunity of giving a demonstration of our strength. Now the hour has struck but are you ready ? This is not a question which concerns only one Taluka. It concerns many Talukas and many districts. If you lose, all will suffer."

This was the refrain of his talk, and after giving the people seven days' time to think over carefully the risks involved and come to a firm decision, Vallabhbhai returned to Ahmedabad and wrote a detailed letter on the 6th February to the Governor of Bombay in which he requested him to postpone the recovery of the revised land revenue until such time as the whole matter could be reviewed. He wrote :

> "That would be the least that the Government could do in order that justice is done to the people. In that review the people should be given an opportunity to put forward their side of the case and the Government must give an assurance that they will give full weight to the arguments thus put forward. There is every possibility of this conflict assuming a grave form and it is in your hands to prevent such a development. If you feel it will help to discuss the matter with me personally I am ready to come whenever you desire."

The Government had committed a legal mistake in increasing the land revenue assessment of some villages by some 50 to 60 per cent as a consequence of their being simultaneously upgraded for purposes of classification. To this matter too Vallabhbhai drew the attention of the Governor. All he received in reply was a very short and curt reply signed by the Private Secretary to the Governor to the effect that his letter had been sent to the Revenue Department for disposal. No further communication was received from the Revenue Department until the 11th. Meantime, the time limit given to the agriculturists to make up their minds had also expired. And so Vallabhbhai went once again to Bardoli on the 12th. Again, he discussed the whole question in all its aspects with the people. He cross-examined the representatives of every single village. He

found in the replies he received from them all a firm determination to fight to the bitter end. Nevertheless, he felt it necessary to give one more warning of the dangers involved in the conflict once it began. He emphasized the fact that it was far better not to undertake a risky and dangerous task unless one was determined to see it through at any cost, for "if you fail in this conflict, rest assured you will not be able to fight again for a hundred years. It is for you to take whatever decision there is to be taken; therefore give full thought and only then decide to do what you consider proper." In another meeting he said:

"I wrote to the Government and suggested that an impartial committee should be appointed. The Government have replied that my letter has been forwarded to the Revenue Department for consideration and disposal. That can scarcely be called a reply. The land revenue law of the Government is very involved and complicated. It has been so drafted that the Government can interpret it in any way it likes. It is a law appropriate only to a truly tyrannical Government. According to that law, the basis of land revenue assessment is the net profit to the agriculturist of his cultivation. But the question that arises is, does the agriculturist make a net profit? As he has his own doubts on this subject, the Settlement Commissioner considers the lease money to be synonymous with net profit and because the lease rates have gone up, has based the revised assessment rates on that increase. They have made many mistakes in law. The Government was somehow anxious to enforce the new assessment in the current year. They seem to have thought that hardly anyone understands the legal niceties of the Land Revenue Code, and so whatever they do will pass muster. The Government had shown its unwillingness even to suspend the recovery of the revised land revenue until the various points raised by me in my letter were settled. What more can I say to the Government in these circumstances? We have done everything we could and now there remains only one way, that is, to oppose force with force. The Government has all the paraphernalia of authority and has the physical strength of the armed forces. You have the strength of truth and your capacity to endure pain. These are the two rival forces. The Government's stand is unjust and to oppose it is, therefore, your duty. If that is fixed in your minds, then no amount of the Government's brute strength is going to have the slightest effect. They wish to collect money but it is for you to give. It is for you to decide whether you will pay the revised land revenue or not. If you make up your minds that you will not

give even one pie, whatever the Government may do, however many confiscations it may carry out, however many fields it may take away, the Government will not be able to collect the revised land revenue, which you are unwilling to accept. The Government does not have in its possession any weapons with which it can compel you to modify your decision, but do not make up your mind because someone flatters you or because you have confidence in me. If you wish to do anything at all, you must rely on your own strength, on your own courage and on your own ability to be ruined in the course of this fight, if necessary. When you take this decision, remember that you are taking it as a pledge, but if you have at the back of your mind the fear that against this powerful Government you will not be able to stand out, for heaven's sake do not enter the fight. If you, on the other hand, are satisfied that this Government is not prepared to listen to any fair proposal and that by failing to stand up to it, you will only ruin yourselves and your children and in addition lose your self-respect, then alone you should undertake this fight. This is not merely a question of an increase of a lakh of rupees or so, or of 37 lakhs in 30 years but a question of truth and falsehood, a question of self-respect. It is a fight against the Government's practice of not giving any hearing to the agriculturists."

Three Members of the Legislature were present at this Conference. They also spoke and said that they had done everything that they could and since their efforts had failed they were happy now to hand over the fight to a leader who could guide them along the path of Satyagraha. The Conference then passed the following resolution with the support of respectable landholders of all the communities of the Taluka, Patidars, Baniyas, Christians, Muslims and backward classes :

"This Conference of the people of Bardoli Taluka resolves that the revision settlement in Bardoli which the Government has decided to impose and collect is, in our view, arbitrary, unjust and oppressive, and advises all the occupants to refuse payment of the revised assessment, until the Government is prepared to accept the amount of the old assessment in full satisfaction of their dues or until the Government appoints an impartial tribunal to settle the whole question of revision by investigation and inquiry on the spot."

Thus the battle was joined. Camps were opened at different places to warn people against the efforts which Government officers had already begun to make to break the unity of the people and to recover the land revenue by

recourse to various methods of persuasion, pressure, etc. Another object of these camps was, of course, also to encourage the few who were hesitant or afraid of consequences and to achieve and maintain complete unity among the different castes and creeds. Each of these camps was placed in charge of selected workers, workers from outside also started pouring in : they were placed in charge of camps at different places. Manilal Kothari started the collection of funds for the campaign. Later, Pyarelal took charge of the English Publications Section. The leaflets issued by this Department became the daily food of the people, and the Bombay papers started reprinting them everyday in full. From Kathiawad also there came a small batch of workers. These people prepared songs which could be easily learnt and remembered and these were soon heard throughout the Taluka ; whether in the market place or in the field, or in the street, young and old started singing these refrains. "Even if we are cut to pieces, we shall keep our pledge. Wake up brave fighters, the battle drums have sounded. Wake up the brave, run away the coward."

The staunch Muslim, Imamsaheb, took upon himself the responsibility of creating enthusiasm for the campaign among the Muslim community. Since the age of 12 he had not missed one single fast. The month of Ramzan came during the campaign, and although he had to move about in the countryside almost continuously, he kept his fasts. In spite of this fasting he used to go from Bardoli to Valod to deliver his religious sermons. The effect of such conduct was astonishing on the Muslims and they too signed the pledge of Satyagraha.

Without the full co-operation and enthusiastic support of the women it would have been impossible to conduct such a campaign successfully. Confiscation meant that they would lose all their thriftily collected household effects and their carefully nurtured cattle. It would not have been surprising if women had weakened on such occasions ; but that would have happened only if they had not been fully impressed with the justice and the importance of the cause. If they had weakened, the effect on the men would have

been very serious indeed ; but in Bardoli the women did not fall behind whether in physical bravery or in making sacrifices or in undergoing hardships. Indeed they far excelled men in all these respects. The credit for that goes to women workers, who went from house to house in every village and instilled their own enthusiasm into the women.

Vallabhbhai, of course, throughout kept an eye on everything that went on in every part of the Taluka. He needed as his Secretary someone who would remain with him all through the 24 hours of the day. That task was taken up by Swami Anand who discharged it with remarkable success.

Thus in a few days the organization for conducting the campaign was completed. With the beginning of the campaign there coincided the marriage season. Many people felt that " since we have to fight and suffer in this campaign, let us at least first of all enjoy the pleasures of this marriage season." Vallabhbhai immediately in a leaflet warned them against succumbing to this temptation :

> " If you have any marriages to celebrate, you will have to see that you are through with them very quickly. If you wish to fight a war, then you cannot afford to celebrate weddings. Pretty soon you will have to lock up your doors from dawn till sunset and wander about in the field. You will have to lead a camp life. Let everyone concerned men, women, children, old and young, understand this. Rich and poor of all classes and all communities must work in complete harmony. Everyone must come home at night. So arrange matters that the Government would find it impossible to discover a single man to help them in carrying away any confiscated property. That must be the condition throughout the Taluka. I have yet to see any officer with authority carrying away on his own shoulders the property confiscated by him. Government officers by themselves are really helpless. Let every Patel, Mukhi, Talati and others who are drawn upon for forced labour refuse to help the Government and say quite plainly that the honour and prestige of my village and my Taluka is my honour and my prestige. If my Taluka loses its honour what is the value of my Mukhiship ? We must create such an atmosphere that you get from it the fragrance of independence instead of the evil smell of slavery. The glow of the determination to fight against the Government should be apparent on everyone's face. Let me warn you that now you have no longer the time to waste in merriment and in leisure. Wake up. Today the prestige

of India lies in your hands. Be firm in your determination not to give the Government one single pie. If that does not happen, the Taluka will remain burdened for ever and your life will have been in vain."

Section III

At last on the 17th February Vallabhbhai received the following reply from the Government to the letter which he had addressed to them on the 6th February :

"In approving the new assessment the Government resolution had said that until the next settlement the Taluka would go on prospering. His Excellency the Governor adheres firmly to this view. The history of the Bardoli and Chaurasi Talukas during the last 20 years supports this prophecy. The Government is not prepared either to postpone the collection of land revenue assessment according to the revised rates or to reconsider the revised rates or to give any kind of relief. Although this is well known, if the people of Bardoli whether on their own initiative or on the advice of outsiders fail to pay up the land revenue, the Governor-in-Council will not have the slightest hesitation in taking whatever steps they are entitled to take under the Land Revenue Code and will not hold themselves responsible for any losses that may ensue to those who fail to pay up the land revenue."

As Vallabhbhai and other workers were described as outsiders in this letter, Vallabhbhai felt that the letter called for a reply. After thanking the Government for their threats to the people, he said :

"You regard me and my colleagues as outsiders. I am helping my own people and am bringing to light your misdeeds. You are forgetting that you speak on behalf of a Government which is composed mainly of outsiders. Let me assure you that though I claim to belong as much to Bardoli as to any other part of India, I have come to Bardoli at the request of the distressed people of the Taluka, and it is open to them to tell me to clear out at any moment. How much nicer had it been if they had it in their power equally easily to dispense with this administration of foreigners which has been sapping their vitality and which is maintained in power by force of arms."

This reply made Mr Smyth, the Revenue Secretary of the Government of Bombay, very angry, and he wrote to Vallabhbhai in reply a letter even more impertinent than the first letter :

"The Public of Bardoli has not yet become bankrupt, nor is it on the point of becoming bankrupt. The population of the

Taluka has increased and is still increasing and there are no signs of its being in financial difficulties. I must make it clear that this letter, as the previous one, contains only the carefully considered views of His Excellency the Governor-in-Council. This decision must, therefore, be considered final. If you wish to carry on any further correspondence on this subject, you may do so through the District Collector."

After obtaining the Government's permission, Vallabhbhai gave to the Press the whole of the correspondence for publication, with a covering letter in which he exposed the Government's perverse attitude and the limited objective of the Satyagraha :

"As will be seen from this correspondence, what the people desired was an independent tribunal to examine the matter which is in dispute. The people's point of view is that there is no justification for increasing the land revenue, but instead of maintaining that point of view, I confined the people's final and firm demand to the appointment of an independent tribunal. I have questioned the reasonableness of the Settlement Officer's report and I have equally maintained that the basis on which the Settlement Commissioner has worked is also unreasonable. It is for the Government to make enquiries and to prove that I am wrong. But the principal officers of the Revenue Department are determined to maintain the position that no one may question any decision of the Government in the matter of land revenue. The people may tell the Government what their objections or difficulties are. The Government would think over them, make such enquiries as they considered necessary and then whatever orders they issued must be regarded as final and irrevocable. There can be no appeal against them. What an idea to suggest that there should be a tribunal to determine a point of disagreement between an all powerful Government and the people!"

By a coincidence, while the Revenue Secretary, Mr Smyth, was carrying on this arrogant correspondence with Vallabhbhai and was insulting him and his colleagues by calling them outsiders, the Member of the Executive Council in charge of the Finance Department, Sir Chunibhai Mehta, was praising in very generous terms these very 'outside' people for the great work they had done for flood relief. His actual words were :

"It must be an intense satisfaction to Mahatma Gandhi, that his labours for the creation of a band of selfless workers to be pioneers of missionary social activities, particularly in the rural areas, has met with an ample response, and that the volunteers

mostly drawn from the Vidyapith should have acquitted themselves so creditably in the absence of their beloved leader when they were faced by an unforeseen calamity of unparalleled magnitude. How the challenge was at once taken up by Vallabhbhai Patel and with what energy he carried out his plan of work is now well known."

But it is possible that the Finance Minister was not able to carry conviction to the Revenue Minister of that fact.

Anglo-Indian Journals like *The Times of India* played up to the Government in the expected manner. Only a little while ago they had been praising Vallabhbhai for his excellent work in connection with flood relief, but now they started attacking him as being the leader of an agitation calculated to confuse the Government and to obstruct administration, and as one who was doing grave disservice to the country by encouraging the peasants of Gujarat to take part in an illegal movement. Although Vallabhbhai had made it perfectly clear that the objective of this campaign was of an extremely limited nature, some newspapers started describing the campaign as a revival of the old Bardoli Civil Disobedience Movement and a 'no tax' movement. *The Times of India* gave publicity to yet another falsehood by stating that Gandhiji was not participating in this movement because he was not in favour of it. In actual fact as in the case of the flood calamity, it was Vallabhbhai himself who had requested Gandhiji not to come to Bardoli, but to see from his Ashram in Sabarmati how the fight was being conducted. Gandhiji had already publicly blessed the conflict and had been encouraging and generally guiding the movement through articles which he wrote from time to time in the *Young India* and *Navajivan.* While publishing the correspondence between the Government and Vallabhbhai in the *Navajivan* Gandhiji wrote as follows:

"This correspondence constitutes in one sense a sad chapter. So far as I can see, the facts put forward by Vallabhbhai are complete and the arguments based on those facts unassailable. The Government's reply shows merely debating skill and is characteristically rude in its tone. Power makes people blind and the arrogance of power makes them forsake reasonableness and good manners. In accordance with the normal practice of Satyagraha,

Vallabhbhai had put it to the Government politely that it was possible that the Government was not wrong and that people might have misled him. If that was so, then let an independent tribunal be appointed and justice be done. Do not claim that you are infallible. In ignoring his request the Government has made a mistake and in fact made it easier for the people to practise Satyagraha.

"The Government goes on to say that Vallabhbhai is an outsider and a foreigner and that if he and his colleagues had not gone to Bardoli, the people would have paid up the land revenue. This is verily a case of the pot calling the kettle black. As long as Bardoli is in India, no one among us would be prepared to call anyone, who lives in the country extending from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and from Karachi to Dibrugadh as a non-Indian. It is the Government's British officers who are foreigners and outsiders. Indeed one might even go so far as to say that all the officers of this foreign Government whether they are black or white, are foreigners. What is this strange perversity which leads this foreign Government to call a person like Vallabhbhai a foreigner to Bardoli? It is conduct such as this which has led people like myself to consider it a sin to remain loyal to the Government and to want to non-co-operate with it. Where discourtesy reaches such limits, how can one hope for justice?"

The first shot in the campaign was fired by the Government on the 15th February. In a Taluka, in which hardly ever before it had been necessary to serve a notice for payment of fine for failure to pay land revenue, notices were served on 50 well-known Baniya citizens of Valod and Bajipara calling upon them to pay up the new land revenue within 10 days. This was followed by notices on some 50 or 60 more Baniyas. The Government appeared to have taken as its first victims Baniyas believing them to be soft and more amenable to pressure. The Government announced certain concessions which were known as 'Igatpuri Concessions'. If the increase in land revenue was in excess of 25 per cent, the landholders would not be called upon to pay that increase for two years. This was one form of temptation. Then there was the method of physical pressure. In a village called Bedkuva, a Talati forced a Harijan peasant to pay up his dues by beating him. A Deputy Collector adopted yet another method. He invited a wealthy and elderly Baniya landholder to his house and requested him to pay up something "for my sake". Even if a rupee was paid, it would

satisfy him. The old man replied, "I have great regard for you but I have also to live in this village. Since the village has decided that no one must pay the land revenue, I cannot do anything." When Vallabhbhai heard of this incident he had a message sent to the old man : "What you should have said in reply was that since you are showing so much consideration for me, I suggest that for my sake you hand in your resignation. Whoever stands by the side of the people when they are in difficulty is a real official and the others are mere hirelings or servants."

The people of Bardoli Taluka had the reputation of being very soft. The officials had thought that if they were firm and used a little pressure, people would themselves come forward to pay up the land revenue. But the camps of workers and volunteers had been very carefully organized and they successfully kept up the morale of the people. The result was that far from yielding, the people stood firm despite all manner of pressure, beating and trickery. Vallabhbhai had his fingers well on the pulse of the people and put them progressively to harder tests as they became more accustomed to facing hardships. In the early days of the fight he said in a speech to the people :

> "The Government says you are happy. I must say, when I look at your houses, that I cannot see that you are any happier than the peasants of other districts. Yet, there is one thing: You are becoming much softer through fear. You do not know how to quarrel and to fight. That is a good quality. But we must not become so soft that we even cease to be annoyed at injustice. That is cowardice. I move about in this District at midnight, but no one ever asks me who I am. Ravishankar goes so far as to say that in this Taluka not even a dog barks at a stranger, nor does a buffalo venture to threaten anybody. It is this excessive "gentleness" of yours that is now your biggest difficulty. Therefore let some pride show itself in your eye and your expression, and learn to fight for justice and against injustice."

Section IV

A Revenue Officer succeeded in winning over two Bania landholders. He suggested to them to leave in their houses sufficient money placed in such a way that it could immediately be seized the moment the seizure was to be

carried out. This was done and currency notes to the value of Rs 1500 and Rs 785 respectively were taken from their houses. When the people learnt of this trick, they were extremely angry and decided to impose a very rigid boycott on the culprits. As soon as Vallabhbhai heard of this, he went to the village where he arrived late at night. In pacifying the people, he said :

> "It is quite understandable that you should be annoyed at this stratagem, but do not do anything under the influence of your anger. We cannot possibly carry out a campaign such as ours by compelling people to stand firm by force or by other artificial means. We have joined in a battle with the Government. While that battle is on, let us not fight with our own brothers. What will you gain by fighting them ? I hear that there are a few other such weak persons. Tell them, 'By all means pay up if you wish to. Break your pledge, but pay up in a straightforward manner. If you do it in a surreptitious manner such as these two people have done, you will reduce our prestige with the Government.' My only request to you is to take from this instance a salutary lesson and let us be more vigilant of ourselves and our weaknesses. There is not much point in pursuing this matter further. If we dwell on a dirty thing it only continues to give bad odour. The wise man, on the other hand, will simply cover the dirty evil smelling thing with a handful of dust and go forward. Only if you behave in that manner will you be successful."

Although the people were somewhat pacified, they felt that if they allowed these two individuals to go scot-free, their organization would be weakened. Therefore they directed these two to do something by way of penance. One of the two accepted this advice and as a penance donated a sum of Rs 800/- to the Satyagraha campaign. It took some time to persuade the other individual, but he also in the end donated Rs 651/- as his penance. This and other instances showed the tendency of the people to overstep the bounds of Satyagraha.

The weapon of boycott is such that there is always the danger of exceeding reasonable limits. So far only one village of Bardoli Taluka, named Kadod, had not joined in the campaign. The Baniyas of that place were large landholders and were also owners of land in neighbouring villages. They had paid up their land revenue dues for all their lands. At first the people resolved not to cultivate the land of these

Baniyas even on lease; later they decided not to let even agricultural labourers work on the land; after a while they went further and decided to boycott the entire village of Kadod until these landholders came into line with the rest. Many other villages, too, started imposing rigid boycott in this manner, whether through the Panchayats of the villages or of the communities. In order to check this tendency Gandhiji recorded a note on the care with which the weapon of boycott should be employed:

"It appears that the Satyagrahis of Bardoli employ the weapon of boycott against anyone who shows willingness to pay or pays up the land revenue assessment. The weapon of boycott is very dangerous. A Satyagrahi can use it only under very rigid control, for, a boycott can be both non-violent and violent. A Satyagrahi can never employ the violent form of boycott. I will merely give some illustrations of the two types of boycott. Not to accept service from anybody is a non-violent form of boycott; not to render service is a violent form. Not to dine at the boycotted person's house, not to take part on ceremonial occasions, such as those of marriage, or to have any dealings with him or to accept any assistance from him, these are all illustrations of non-violent boycott; but to refuse to render service to the boycotted person when he is ill, to prevent a doctor from attending to him, to refrain from assisting him in the event of death in the funeral ceremonies, to deprive him of the use of a well or a temple, these are all forms of violent boycott. A little thought makes it clear that a non-violent form of boycott alone can stand the strain for any length of time because it cannot be broken by the employment of any external force. Not so, however, is the case with the violent form of boycott which can be broken by the application of strong external force. Therefore, the violent form of boycott in the end is bound to be disadvantageous to the movement. Instances can be given where violence during a period of non-violent non-co-operation has thus proved harmful to the cause. I hope that the distinction which I have now pointed out will be sufficient to point the right path to the Satyagrahis of Bardoli and to the volunteers working there."

This note had a salutary effect and the people appreciated more clearly the limitations of the boycott and tried to adhere to the right principles.

The imposition of a fine of one-fourth of land revenue assessment and the confiscations did not have any chastening effect on the people. The Government officers, therefore,

felt that the time had come for taking more drastic steps. On the 26th of March, notices were attached to the houses of a merchant and seven large landholders of Valod, to the effect that if they did not pay their land revenue assessment before the 12th of April, their land would be forfeited. In reply to the notice the merchant wrote to the Mahalkari * as follows :

> "You must have regarded me as the weakest landholder in the whole Mahal † and, therefore, have selected me for serving this first notice. But now, like all others, I, too, am determined not to pay land revenue until justice is done. You and I have been on friendly terms and have enjoyed good social relations. For that reason and as a well-wisher of yours I would like to advise you that it would be more honourable for you to resign from your service rather than to carry out the work of attaching land belonging to the peasants."

The seven Baniyas of Valod assured Vallabhbhai in writing : "The Government began these confiscations with our village, and just as the Government failed in that effort, so will they fail now in their effort to frighten us through notices of forfeiture. Of this you may rest assured."

In a meeting which had been convened to congratulate these Baniyas, Vallabhbhai called upon the people to be prepared for a yet more painful phase of the campaign :

> "I have not entered into this conflict in order to save you some money. I wish to teach a lesson, through this campaign, to the peasants of the whole of Gujarat that this Government is able to carry on only because of their weakness. On the one hand, this big Simon Commission has come from England in order to examine in what way responsible Government can be given to the country; there is talk of handing over to the people within two years the Revenue Department. Simultaneously, the Government is making plans to forfeit land in this Taluka. All this is empty talk. The sons of the peasants have nothing to be afraid of. They must have confidence that this land of their forefathers will remain theirs. No one can unjustly deprive the peasant of his land and get away with it. Ten years ago even when there was no devolution of power at all in the country, the Government had failed to forfeit even one *bigha* of land in the Kheda District. How

* The administrative head of the Mahal. His functions and powers correspond to those of a Tahsildar (or as he is known in Bombay State, Mamlatdar).

† A smaller administrative unit than a Taluka.

can it hope to succeed now? It is unnecessarily wasting its time and paper. When it comes to forfeiting land in this manner, it will be clear that there is no Government in the country. It will then be robbers with whom we shall be dealing. I say let the robbers come. There will be greater fun in their rule than in the rule of these foreign Baniyas. I will say firmly to the people of the Taluka that they should be afraid of no one. Just look at the great difference that has taken place in the last six weeks in you. Then there was on your expression so much fear and anxiety. You were afraid to sit together and today the Mahalkari is merely an official who is entitled to the use of this building. His fiat runs no further. Indeed, if things continue thus, he will find it difficult to get the services of even a *chaprasi* *."

The time limit given in the forfeiture notice was the 12th of April. It at last arrived. Government officers had been hoping that the people would be frightened by this threat of forfeiture. Their state of mind was clearly described in an article in *The Times of India*:

"The Satyagraha movement shows no signs of abatement. The notices of forfeiture have been served but the method of forfeiture in the Land Revenue Code is so complicated that it will take some weeks before people realize precisely what the Government has done. The threat given by the Government to forfeit their land is a threat which will frighten people, .and when they realize that the Satyagraha is not achieving the result they were led to believe it would, it is likely that the movement will collapse."

That hope was proving a vain hope. All over Bardoli one now felt that a new atmosphere was prevailing.

Section V

In the meantime, Bardoli was having its effect outside too. In Poona, a special meeting was convened to discuss Bardoli matters and to wish the people all success. Even the attention of the Moderate Bombay Presidency Association was drawn to Bardoli and at a special session they passed the following resolution:

"The Executive Committee of this Body records its great dissatisfaction at the policy which the Government of Bombay have been pursuing in increasing land revenue assessment in Talukas, such as Bardoli, Alibag, etc., and approves of the recommendation of the Land Revenue Assessment Committee to have the matter decided finally in the Legislature. This

* A peon.

Committee, therefore, resolves that until the whole question of land revenue is re-examined and the matter brought under the control of the Legislature, the implementing of the decision to increase the assessment should be suspended."

The Government paid no heed to this warning and was determined to give effect to the decision which it had already taken. The weapons of deceit, of persuasion, of fear, of falsehood, were all employed at different times. " So and so has paid up the land revenue, why have you so far failed to do so ? You will have to pay it sooner or later." This was the refrain of the Government officers in their efforts to persuade the simple peasant to pay up his land revenue. There was the case of a petty washerman who owed a few annas as assessment ! Some poor Talati paid the amount from his own pocket in the hope that he would get his money back by making the washerman wash a few clothes for him free of cost.

Vallabhbhai, meantime, continued with his fighting speeches to encourage the peasants in their determination to put up a brave fight. Mahadevbhai writes :

" I was with Vallabhbhai four years ago in Borsad. Thereafter too, I have heard him speak but never before had I heard such brilliance in his language or seen such indignation in his eyes. He seemed to suffer physical pain himself when he heard that the land of any peasant was forfeited. His words were full of the pain which one realized he felt personally at the hardships that were being inflicted. The villagers were moved by the extraordinary eloquence of his speeches and by his astonishingly simple yet effective popular similes and analogies."

It was in these meetings that one saw for the first time the great command over the Gujarati language that he possessed and which was so completely free of the influence of English. It is from the speeches of Vallabhbhai in Bardoli that the lovers of Gujarati language and literature discovered how rich their language was and with what vigour and power it was possible to express one's ideas in it. Although much force is lost in translation, here is a sample from one of his speeches :

" In the early days of this campaign there were peasants who used to tell me, 'Instead of incurring the various risks of this

campaign we will get up a couple of hours earlier in the morning and work harder' (to pay up the additional assessment). What is the use of such men continuing to live on this earth ? If they wish to live the life of a bullock they should die and seek re-birth as a bullock. But I want to see the people of Gujarat full of fire and courage. I say to them, you may be weak physically, but that does not mean that you cannot have the heart of a lion. For the sake of your self-respect, have the courage to die. You may spend lakhs of rupees but you cannot obtain these two things, which you are obtaining today through this fight, courage and self-respect. Indeed, the Goddess Lakshmi has come to your house to garland you and you must think yourselves fortunate indeed that the Government has put this increased assessment on you."

About this time, Vallabhbhai came to be spoken of as the Sardar of the peasants. Some one evidently used the word and whoever heard it went on repeating it, and why should that not be so ? No title was better deserved. Whoever heard or read his speeches during the Bardoli campaign, recognized how greatly he felt for the peasant and his lot, and how genuine was his concern for him ; and what is more, how profound was his knowledge of the problems and difficulties of the peasant, and of the different types of direct and indirect injustice that the peasant had to endure. There was perhaps no other person in the whole country who could present to the Government and to the public the peasant's case based on such profound knowledge of it. So Mahadevbhai wrote :

"It was in 1917-18 that Vallabhbhai came under Gandhiji's influence, and learnt from him the first principles of Indian nationalism — that the real India is to be found in the villages, and the peasant is at the head and centre of it, and that no scheme of freedom or progress of work would have any meaning, unless it was framed with special, even exclusive, reference to him. I might say that this knowledge was brought out in Vallabhbhai rather than newly transmitted to him for it was there but deeply submerged. And the moment it was brought out it blossomed forth in him as perhaps it has hardly ever done in anybody else. What is the proper place of the agriculturist ? What is his condition ? What is the right way of regenerating him ? All that was made clear to Vallabhbhai by a shrewd observer (Gandhiji) who was not an agriculturist himself, and the pupil who had in him the blood of generations of agriculturists understood the situation thoroughly and explained it to the people in

a form in which the original observer could never have done. He took the first opportunity of serving the agriculturists during the Kheda land revenue campaign, pursued it further in Borsad, but the opportunity which came to him in Bardoli was incomparably the greatest."

The references to the place and the problems of the agriculturists that one finds in his Bardoli speeches are such as were never before noticeable in any of his previous speeches. In Kheda he was merely working as a soldier under the leadership of Gandhiji and so spoke but little. The fight in Borsad was a fight on behalf of the peasants but it had not arisen out of their hardships as peasants. It was a problem peculiar to Borsad and the speeches which were made were made with reference to that special circumstance. But the land revenue assessment was the main problem of the agriculturists as such, and if any service was to be rendered to the peasants of Gujarat, it could be done only by solving this very difficult problem. Vallabhbhai had realized this long ago. The opportunity of rendering that service came to him in Bardoli.

His great, profound and unending affection for the agriculturists revealed itself in his speeches. "On the agriculturist depend millions, the agriculturist depends on none. Ah Agriculturist! you have truly been regarded as the father of the world." That old and well-known Gujarati saying he quoted again and again. He was never tired of saying: "In this world the only genuine producers are the agriculturists and the labourers. All others merely live as parasites upon them. The condition of the agriculturists and labourers should, therefore, be the best; instead, we have reduced them to the lowest." Once in a speech he showed how painful this was to him:

"The world is entirely dependent upon the agriculturist and upon the labourer. And yet no one suffers greater tyranny and injustice than these two. The reason for it is that they put up with these injustices and hardships silently. I am an agriculturist myself and can, therefore, realize what is in his heart. It is that knowledge which enables me to tell him that the real cause of his misfortune is his complete defeatism and despair. He has begun to think that it is impossible to fight against so powerful a Government, so that even a donkey is now able to come and

threaten him in the name of the Government, abuse him, force him to do compulsory labour and impose on him whatever burden of taxation the Government may desire. He is required to pay a tax on a tree which he has grown with years of care and labour. He has to pay a tax for the rainfall in his land. He has to pay for drawing water out of the well dug by himself. A merchant sitting comfortably in his shop escapes any tax if his income is less than Rs 2000/-. But the agriculturist, who may have only a portion of an acre of land and maintains on its yield a bullock or a buffalo, has to work incredibly hard, to mess about in manure and dust and to plant seedlings in knee-deep water, ignoring risks from poisonous scorpions. He may borrow in order to purchase the seeds he requires and when the cotton is grown, he himself, accompanied by his wife and children, goes to pick the cotton, brings it home and then tries to sell it. If after having done all this, he makes a little money, the Government imposes a tax on it."

Section VI

On seeing the amazing spirit of the people, the Government decided to exercise greater strictness over the Taluka. The Commissioner of the Northern Division, Mr Smart, who had gone to the sea-side for rest, was ordered to proceed to Surat and to camp there. The Collector was also resting in the neighbouring State and he was also ordered to come down. It was surprising that while so much was happening in the Taluka, the District Collector had not thought it necessary even to visit Bardoli. He was content to see everything through the eyes of his deputy. When he received orders from the top, he went at once to the Taluka and saw that all the shops were shut and the doors of all the houses were locked. Not a man was to be had to wait on him. Then he thought he would go to some smaller village. The policeman went to hire a taxi. The taxi-driver said that the car was already engaged. So his licence was taken away. With the greatest difficulty he reached the village Sarbhon. As he approached it, the young men immediately beat the drum, so that by the time the Collector entered the village, the doors of every single house were shut and the streets were completely deserted. The Collector sent for the Patels who replied, "The people will not listen to us. The people are indifferent about forfeitures and confiscations." Then

he called a meeting of the Talatis and asked them to plot out land in such a manner that it would be possible to sell whole blocks of land to purchasers. Having done this he returned to Surat and informed the correspondent of *The Times of India* :

> "Many agriculturists are willing to pay up their land revenue dues but unfortunately they are threatened with arson, harassment and boycott by outsiders who have neither a house in the village nor land in the fields. If the agriculturists listen to the false advice of such non-co-operationists, they alone will have to suffer in the end. There is every possibility of disturbances taking place in the Taluka as a result of the activities of these non-co-operationists."

Without seeing a single village the Collector unblushingly made this completely false statement.

Then began the rule of seizures, and orders were issued to seize buffaloes. The then Mamlatdar was considered to be weak and so he was transferred to another Taluka. He was replaced by a man who was reputed to be a stronger and more determined person. Three special officers were appointed for the purpose of carrying out confiscations and they were given special powers. In order to assist these special officers a number of Pathans of questionable character were brought in from Bombay. The reaction of the people to all this was to unite in a firmer manner than ever before to fight against the Government, and they imposed a most severe form of boycott on the officers. Gandhiji had already warned everybody against wrong forms of boycott. Sardar too asked the people to realize that the officers were not their enemies. They were merely carrying out orders. To refuse them foodstuffs or so to arrange things that they could not obtain milk, vegetables, or the services of the Dhobi or the barber, or medicines and other essential things was not Satyagraha but cruelty. Yet, this did not mean that they should help them in any way in their work of attachment, nor was there any objection to people refusing them any assistance by way of bullock carts they might require, or labour they might want. Another important piece of advice which the Sardar gave was that the people should not form a crowd to watch any process of attach-

ment, for that would be to do precisely what the Government wanted. When people collected thus, it was far easier for the Government to instigate quarrels and fights amongst them. Besides, Sardar prohibited public speaking except by himself. His object was to make it impossible for the Government and its officers to suggest that the people had in any way been incited to violence. In his interview the Collector had said that the people were reluctant to pay up land revenue because of fear. To that Sardar replied that if anybody wanted to pay up his land revenue dues, but was afraid to do so, he had only to go to him (Sardar) and he would himself accompany him to the Mamlatdar ; if anyone dared to attack the would-be payer of revenue, he (Sardar) would ask to be hit first.

Meantime, the Attachment Officers began to behave as if they had complete freedom of action and were not governed by any rules or regulations. At any time that they liked, without any enquiry whatever, without even making certain that the property in question belonged to the person whose property they were supposed to be attaching, they started taking possession of cattle belonging both to those who owned land and those who did not own any land at all. Although large numbers of cattle were being attached daily, no arrangements were made to look after them. There was none to give them even water at the right time. The Government had engaged Pathans to attach buffaloes and to look after them. One poor buffalo died mooing for food or water in a police station. A poor tailor who possessed no land whatever had three of his buffaloes attached and confined in the police station. When he went to free them, the Mahalkari told him : "We have had to keep these buffaloes for two days and to feed them, you may take away your buffaloes on payment of that expense." The tailor said that this was a queer kind of justice. "Instead of your compensating me, you are fining me." The Government could find no one from the Taluka to purchase these buffaloes in auction. So they began to persuade butchers from outside to come and bid. Seeing buffaloes suffering for want of water in the heat of the day and finding them sold away at

ridiculous prices, a charitable-minded Bania gentleman of Bardoli told the Mamlatdar that he would like to give a donation to ensure that these poor buffaloes were looked after adequately and received all the grass and water they needed. To this the Mamlatdar replied that the Government had sufficient money in its coffers and needed no such assistance.

The peasants who loved their animals as dearly as their children could not bear to see this inhuman treatment. In order to prevent this torture, the whole Taluka decided to become a sort of prison. They kept their houses shut day and night, thus making attachment impossible. Both men and cattle were thus self-imprisoned. Water too was brought into the houses and given to the cattle. Those who had relatives in the neighbouring Baroda State sent their cattle to that State with the result that their children lost what little milk and buttermilk they were getting. But it was quite impossible to send all the cattle in this way. That is why they all finally decided upon this curious form of imprisonment. Sardar also, with his fine sense of humour, made the people laugh and to some extent forget their sorrows. On one occasion he said: "Oh! it seems to me that by remaining in the house all day and night your buffaloes are fast becoming white like white women."

Like the buffaloes which were being sold for next to nothing, people's furniture and other movable property were also sold away at ridiculous prices to Government *chaprasis*, police and Pathans. Officers themselves were known to have purchased these things. People who were living in self-imposed imprisonment were greatly amused at seeing officers of the rank of Mamlatdar moving about in the hot sun along with the Pathans in search of buffaloes. One officer who had shown particularly excessive zeal in attaching buffaloes, was named by Sardar the "Buffalo Tiger".

The Department of Agriculture is supposed to work in the interest of the agriculturists but it now became an offensive weapon of the Government. Some agriculturists of the Taluka used to obtain their cotton-seeds from the Agriculture Department and sell their cotton crop through

that Department. The cotton used to be kept in stock at the ginning factories and sold by the Government Department at the right time when the best prices were obtainable. A number of bales of such cotton were lying at the ginning factories. The Mamlatdar attached these bales and the Director of Agriculture was ordered to credit an amount of Rs 73,000 to the account of Land Revenue assessment due from various agriculturists, but no one knew precisely who the agriculturists were. That did not, however, matter; what mattered immediately was that thus three quarters of a lakh of rupees were recovered on account of land revenue. Then again gun licences were taken away for failure to pay up the land revenue while pensioners were threatened with the loss of their pension. The officers of the Education Department and of the Medical Department were also required to bring pressure to bear upon people working in their departments if they happened to be also landholders in the Taluka.

In spite of these varied devices of the Government, the movement continued to gather strength. As a drowning man will snatch at a straw, the Government directed the Collector and the Superintendent of Police to issue somewhat strange orders. The first of these orders made it an offence for any one to persuade drivers of *tongas,* taxis and bullock carts to refuse to transport officers and their belongings. The second order made it an offence to beat a drum near a public road, or in a public place, or in a *mohalla,* or a square. This gave Sardar the opportunity of ridiculing the Government by saying that a Government which was proud of its power backed by arms and ammunition was now frightened by the sound of drums. He advised the people to stop beating drums or blowing trumpets, since the Government was frightened by them.

On one occasion a meeting was held opposite the police station of Valod. As Sardar's speech ended, the buffaloes which had been confined in the police station started bellowing. This gave Sardar the opportunity of taunting: "Listen to these bellows of the buffaloes; reporters, write it down and report that in the police station of Valod the

buffaloes make speeches! The noise of drums upsets the State. If you still do not understand then listen to these buffaloes which tell you that justice has disappeared from this kingdom!"

Sardar was, thus, through his humour, making the people forget their hardships. He would persuade them and would make them laugh, but he never allowed the main task to be forgotten and so he followed up his humorous sallies by more serious pronouncements:

> "I know that it is a hard task for you to remain all day long in your homes cooped up with your family and your cattle. You are ready to tell the Government to take away your cattle and your movable property, but I must ask you to learn to bear pain in an understanding spirit and to be firm in your resolve. Without this we shall not succeed in our fight against a powerful and clever Government. I wish you to see how for the sake of an appointment carrying a few hundred rupees salary, a Brahmin with a sacred thread round his neck is wandering about the Taluka to attach cattle. See how our own people belonging to the so-called higher communities are changed into monsters by this administration."

Section VII

The Government now began to arrest the workers on the slenderest of excuses. A bullock cart owner was being compelled to go against his will on some Government work. Ravishankar Maharaj told him not to be afraid and not to go if he did not wish to. A policeman got into his cart and began to force him to go forward. Ravishankar then told the cart owner to leave the bullock cart and to go along with him (Ravishankar). The bullock cart driver mustered up enough courage to accept this advice. Ravishankar Maharaj was sentenced to five months and 10 days rigorous imprisonment for this offence. Gandhiji wrote on the 30th April, 1928 a letter congratulating him on this sentence:

> "You are a fortunate man. You, who have been happy eating whatever you could get to eat, who have been clothing yourself with whatever you had, whether good clothes or tattered rags, and you to whom all kinds of weather — the bitter cold of winter or the great heat of summer — are alike, are now having the good fortune of being the first to go to jail. If God were willing to allow us to exchange places and you were generous

enough, I would be only too happy to change places with you. May victory be yours and the country's."

In a speech on this occasion Sardar said :

"The Government perhaps thought that in arresting Ravishankar Maharaj, who has been responsible for reforming thousands of Baraiyas, and who is truly a holy man infinitely purer than myself, they would be clipping my wings; but the Government must remember that I have many wings. If the Government does not wish to do justice, they have no escape but to arrest me. For let me assure the Government that my wings will grow afresh just as rapidly and luxuriantly as grass grows during the rainy season."

After a few days, 19 people were arrested from the village Vankaner on the ground that they had obstructed three bullock carts that were carrying the Deputy Collector's luggage and for creating a disturbance. Among these was a student from the Gujarat Vidyapith, the cleaner of Sardar's car and 17 agriculturists. There was no evidence against any of them. A person was said to have been able to identify all these accused by the light of a very dimly burning lantern. The Magistrate did not have the courage to sentence all the accused on this evidence. He therefore let off 5 of them on the ground that they could not be identified, and three others were released for want of satisfactory evidence. The remaining 11 were sentenced on two counts for six months' rigorous imprisonment and one month's simple imprisonment for using force. As if this farcical performance was not sufficient, all these persons were tied together in pairs and were handcuffed as they were taken to jail. The Talati of Vankaner could not bear to see this sight and he tendered his resignation in spite of the fact that he was thereby losing the benefits of his 25 years' service.

On the one hand, there was the intense heat of Vaisakh month, and on the other, the Government was assuming, as it were, a correspondingly hot attitude. It looked almost as if the people were being deliberately irritated in many ways, possibly in the hope that if they took to violence they could be dealt with much easier. The Sardar, realizing this, warned the people :

"Make it impossible for any charge of violence to be levelled against us. Let everyone work with the utmost restraint. Even if you have a just cause for anger be patient. Some one was telling me that the Police Inspector abused a certain person. I would say that that only made the Inspector look foolish. Let us maintain complete peace. At the moment I would ignore any abuse that may be heaped upon me, and you too should put up with abuses in the interests of our campaign. That would soon show them their mistake. Even if an officer of the police, or of any other department behaves unjustifiably and in an unrestrained manner, you for your part should remain patient, and control your temper. Even if they take away from you the thing most dear to you, keep quiet. Do not lose courage, but instead smile. Dignity, courage and with it politeness, patience and self-control, are qualities which are not easy to attain. Through this fight, I pray to God, that these qualities may be acquired by the agriculturists of this Taluka."

And finally it was on this occasion that he used for the Bardoli Taluka the great analogy of the iron and the hammer :

"This time the Government is intensely angry. When the iron is red-hot it lets out sparks, but however hot the iron may be, it is the duty of the hammer to remain cool. If the hammer, on the other hand, becomes too hot it would only burn the striker's hand. If you wish to mould the iron to the shape that you desire, the hammer must keep cool. Likewise, let us too in this adversity not lose our self-control."

Section VIII

In the meantime, the Commissioner of the Northern Division revealed his mental attitude in a letter which he wrote to a doctor in Surat :

"No one could be more anxious than I am to see that the poor people are not ruined by the misleading activities of agitators from Kheda who live upon the people. I shall be willing to examine the case of any village myself if a request is made, supported by good reasons, to show that its land has been wrongly classified. But I can do so only if the question of the payment of 20 per cent increase in the land revenue assessment in the Taluka and in the Mahal is not raised. The Government cannot give up its efforts to recover the land revenue assessments. If that were to happen, objection would be raised to all legally made assessments. The agitators in Bardoli today are the same men who started the campaign of 'no land revenue assessment' in

Kheda District in 1918. The various tricks that have been played in order to prevent people who wish to pay land revenue assessment from doing so are all similar to those that were employed in 1918. People who are willing to pay up land revenue assessment are being threatened by others with ex-communication, social boycott etc.

"These agitators have come from 5 Talukas of the Kheda District and the revision of the land revenue assessment in those Talukas has been suspended for two years. In the last seven or eight months the Government has lent as much as a crore of rupees for flood relief in Kheda District. If these agitators were to be successful, the recovery of the land revenue assessment from that District as also the collection of the Taqavi would be jeopardized."

From a speech of Sardar we see how helpful his attitude was during the flood calamity in the Kheda District :

"Kheda District was flooded and a great calamity befell the people. The Government played its part. As a result, the agriculturists were able to save their crops. But when the time came for the payment of the first instalment, several persons told me it would be good if complete relief from the land revenue assessment could be given on the ground of this calamity. I told them that I could not support such a request. When I see that the Government is doing its best, and that if there is any failure it is not because the Government does not wish to do the right thing but because the local officers are unaccustomed to acts of generosity, how can I ask for such relief ? On that occasion I told all the agriculturists that if by the grace of God they have had a crop, it was their duty to pay up the land revenue. We are taking a loan of a crore of rupees and that loan has to be repaid. In addition, the Government is giving 10 lakhs of rupees which are not to be recovered. Besides that the public generally has assisted to the extent of some 15 to 20 lakhs of rupees. Whether willingly or unwillingly, the Government has given as much assistance as it could. Under these circumstances, it does not behove us to start a quarrel with it. I am not boasting, but I am merely making a statement of fact when I say that if the voluntary workers had not given timely assistance and distributed seeds throughout the affected area, the Government would have suffered a loss in land revenue in that year from Gujarat of not less than 50 to 60 lakhs of rupees. Nevertheless, when I wrote to them the story of the injustice done to the agriculturists of Bardoli Taluka and emphasized the fact that if they continued in the same manner they would destroy the few agriculturists who still survive in Gujarat, the reply I was given was, 'You are an outsider.'"

Once before the Collector had charged the people with arson and harassment. Sardar in a public speech thanked the Commissioner for not repeating those charges, and reminded him that if these agitators had not rushed to the assistance of flooded Gujarat and had not distributed food and clothes and seeds at considerable risk to their lives, the administration would have broken down. Indeed it was because of these agitators that the money given by the Government was used as it should have been, and people were able to obtain seeds and construction material at cheap and proper rates at shops run by the workers. The Government had thus been able to save considerable amounts of money.

This unfortunately ill-inspired letter of the Commissioner caused considerable indignation in the country. Gandhiji criticized the Commissioner in a strong article in the *Navajivan* and re-clarified the points at issue. He emphasized that it was not the contention of the people of Bardoli that their views should be accepted. Their request was a simpler one, that an independent and unbiased tribunal should be appointed to enquire into their complaint and that whatever ruling the tribunal gives should be enforced. In reply to the libellous charges of the Commissioner, he said :

> "The workers have been described as a gang of agitators who are living upon the people of Bardoli, bent upon misleading them. This is such an insult that had the occasion been propitious and had the people had sufficient realization of their own strength, the Commissioner would have been compelled to offer a public apology. I wish to tell him that those whom he in his anger and in the arrogance of authority calls a gang of agitators, are most respectable and respected servants of the people, who are working at great sacrifice in the Bardoli Taluka. Among these are: Vallabhbhai Patel and the aged Abbas Tyabji. Both of them are Barristers and the latter is an ex-Chief Justice of Baroda. These and many other names which I could give are names of people who have gone to Bardoli on hearing of its difficulties. If the Commissioner has any shred of honour in him, he would of his own accord apologize to them.
>
> "Let me assure the Government that even if the agitators are successful in Bardoli, the Government will have no difficulty in

recovering Taqavi in Kheda District. If there is any difficulty, they will find in Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the leader of the agitators an honorary Collector to see to it that it is collected. But the fact of the matter is that if the agitators are successful in Bardoli, never again will officers of the Government have the courage to insult the public and respected workers and utter falsehoods, such as the Commissioner, Northern Division, has done on this occasion; and people will be able to secure relief against such unjust, inappropriate and terrible increases in land revenue assessment as have been made in Bardoli."

The Commissioner's letter and Gandhiji's reply made Bardoli an all-India issue. But Sardar did not want the Bardoli fight to spread. Rajaji who had come to Ahmedabad about this time was anxious to go to Bardoli but Gandhiji stopped him much to Sardar's relief. About the same time Maganlal Gandhi * died and Sardar wanted to go to Ahmedabad to see Gandhiji, but Gandhiji asked him not to come saying: "You cannot leave Bardoli at the moment, but you can rest assured that I will come there whenever you want me." Sardar, for his part, did not wish Gandhiji to come to Bardoli for that would immediately have given Bardoli an excessive prominence and brought into Bardoli large numbers of people from the rest of India.

The Members of the Legislature thought that it was about time they did something. They wrote to the Governor expressing their surprise at his reluctance to accept a simple request for an independent enquiry, even if it were conducted by a Government official and added that if such a request were not accepted they would be compelled to resign. The Private Secretary to the Governor wrote saying: "It was quite incorrect that the Government had refused an enquiry by a Government officer." The Members of the Legislature thought that here was an opportunity for compromise and they wrote at once that they were glad to hear that the Government was prepared to have an enquiry made through a Government officer. If that was so, they were prepared to persuade Vallabhbhai Patel to accept such an enquiry. The Secretary immediately replied saying that

* Gandhiji's nephew, and close and devoted associate, and a fine administrator.

again there was misunderstanding. He had not given any assurance that an enquiry committee would be appointed. This was indeed the height of impertinence and the nine Members of the Legislature from Gujarat sent in their resignations. In their letter of resignation they said :

> "When the Government forgets its sense of responsibility, breaks the law in so grave a manner, and attempts to crush such fine and gentle people as the people of Bardoli are, then we feel it is our duty to send in our resignations of the membership of the Legislature as a protest against this autocratic policy of the Government."

About that time a meeting of the Working Committee of the Congress was held in Bombay. Everybody in the country felt greatly hurt at the description of Sardar and his colleagues by the Commissioner as " a gang of agitators from Kheda who were misleading the people and were indeed living upon the people ", and the Working Committee reflected popular feeling in the resolution which it passed :

> "The increase in the land revenue assessment in Bardoli Taluka is unjust and has been fixed on the basis of false and inadequate data. Not merely has the Government of Bombay refused to accept the request of the Bardoli Satyagrahis for the appointment of an independent and unbiased committee to inquire into the whole question, but has been taking ruthless steps against the people. The Working Committee of the Congress congratulates the Bardoli Satyagrahis for the unflinching bravery with which they have been resisting the Government and its ruthless measures. It thanks Vallabhbhai Patel and his colleagues for standing by the side of the Bardoli Satyagrahis on this difficult occasion. It congratulates further those Members of the Bombay Legislature who have given in their resignations as a protest against the autocratic policy of the Bombay Government. And it finally records its strong displeasure at the illegal and excessive steps which the Government of Bombay has taken with a view to crushing the Satyagrahis.
>
> "This Committee has read a letter which the Commissioner of the Northern Division of Bombay has written to a doctor of Surat. In that letter the Commissioner has described Vallabhbhai Patel, Abbas Tyabji and other tried and respected servants of the people as a gang of agitators who have been misleading the people and are living upon them and has used other unbecoming expressions which are near falsehoods. The Committee considers that this letter is extremely offensive and unbecoming in an officer holding so high a rank, and requests the

Bombay Government to call upon this Commissioner to apologize publicly for this letter and if he fails to do so, to dismiss him from service. In addition, this Committee requests the Government of Bombay to accept the very reasonable request of the Satyagrahis for an independent and unbiased enquiry. This campaign has now assumed an all-India importance, and the Committee urges the country to assist the Satyagrahis in every way."

Sardar had gone on the occasion of this meeting to Bombay. He was very warmly welcomed and had he so desired he could have taken the members of the Committee to Bardoli, but he did not.

Section IX

On the 27th May, the Surat District Conference was held under the Presidentship of Shri Jairamdas Doulatram. Never before had such a conference been held in Surat. The enthusiasm among the people in regard to the Satyagraha in Bardoli was greatly evident at this Conference. Shri Jairamdas did not think it appropriate to take up the Presidentship without seeing with his own eyes the villages of Bardoli Taluka. So he toured in the Taluka and described in his speech what he saw. "Why does the Government not say quite frankly that they take their stand on force and authority ? If they are unable to defend their conduct on ethical and moral grounds, what do they think they can gain by putting forward false and misleading arguments ?" Condemning Pathan Raj * he said : "It is indeed a shameful matter for Government to let Pathans remain in the Taluka for a single day after it became known that some of them were involved in a theft committed in broad day light." In describing the horrors of Bardoli Taluka and the amazingly restrained attitude of the people, he invited Government officers to go round the villages and see the situation for themselves, discarding, for a moment, their governmental spectacles. They would then see how devoted the agriculturists, their wives and their children were to the leaders and the public workers. Just as this tyrannical conduct of the Bombay Government would constitute a

* The rule of the Pathans who were brought from Bombay by the administration, presumably to terrorize the rather timid local population.

black mark for ever against their administration, so also history would record the insulting behaviour of their officers towards the public workers as an unforgivable and unforgettable stain on their conduct.

Now there started pouring into Bardoli a host of guests. The Sikh leader, Sardar Mangal Singh, came to see the fight for himself and started praising Bardoli. Dr Satyapal was sent by the Punjab Congress Committee to make a personal study. While Seth Jamnalal Bajaj congratulated himself on being given an opportunity to visit Bardoli which to him had become a place of pilgrimage, Shri Joshi and Pataskar came with an objective frame of mind from Maharashtra to see for themselves this campaign on behalf of the agriculturists and to study the conduct of a Satyagraha campaign. They were not non-co-operators. On returning from Bardoli Shri Joshi quoting a famous English poet said: "We had come to scorn and have stayed to praise." In spite of Sardar, Bardoli became the haunt of leaders from all parts of the country, and drew the attention of the nation.

Sardar had so far not asked for money from the public. From the Taluka itself he had received about 10,000 rupees to cover all expenditure. Some donations were being received from outside voluntarily. But now the number of volunteers coming from outside the Taluka was increasing. Numerous agriculturists and public workers started coming to see the manner in which the campaign was being carried out and to understand its implications. Sardar, therefore, asked that Gujarat and greater Gujarat should meet the expenditure of the campaign, and without any special effort money started pouring in.

As the strength of the Bardoli Satyagraha went on increasing, the Government was increasingly puzzled. The heat of the month of May was becoming unbearable. The Government saw that none of its efforts was meeting with success. It finally called a conference. This was attended by two Ministers from Gujarat who were particularly anxious to find a solution. The first condition of the Commissioner and Secretaries was that the question of

appointing a Government officer to conduct an enquiry could be considered only if somehow the land revenue assessment including the increase, was first paid up. Diwan Bahadur Harilalbhai Desai was an old friend of Sardar and he seemed to have given the assurance that Vallabhbhai would accept such a condition. He wrote a letter to Sardar accordingly. Sardar replied telegraphically that it was quite impossible to pay the revised assessment until the tribunal was appointed. The original land revenue assessment would be paid up provided an announcement was made that a very full enquiry would be made, that facilities would be given for putting forward evidence, that popular representatives would have the right to cross-examine the witnesses, that the confiscated lands would be returned, and that persons arrested during the campaign would be released. A compromise on these lines was not acceptable to the Government, and the officers set off to battle with fresh weapons.

On the 31st May the Government published the following announcement addressed to the landholders of Bardoli Taluka and Valod Mahal:

> "By keeping their houses locked up, and by threats to the village Patels and Vethias* of social boycott and ex-communication every effort is being made by landholders to evade payment. All these make attempts at conciliation difficult if not impossible. The Government is left with no alternative but to forfeit land and to attach buffaloes and immovable property and to seek the assistance of Pathans. What is wrong in that? The conduct of the Pathans has been exemplary in every way. The Government is satisfied on that point. The agriculturists are once again warned that their land will be treated as Government Khalsa, and once taken will never again be returned. 1400 acres of land has been disposed of in this way and another 5,000 acres will be disposed of similarly. Moreover, the Government has already recovered a lakh of rupees in payment of land revenue due from the Taluka and the Mahal. Many people are anxious to pay up but hesitate because of the social boycott and ex-communication with which they are being threatened. Therefore, if people will pay up by the 19th of June they will not be required to pay the fine of 25 per cent."

This announcement was full of falsehoods and semi-

* Forced labour men who are called upon to give free labour are thus known in Gujarat.

falsehoods and with its repetition of the usual threats it was regarded by the people as another illustration of the Government's bankruptcy of ideas. Sardar encouraged the people and told them not to be afraid of the threats of confiscation and sale of land. What he said then today appears prophetic :

"Remember that you who are prepared to lose your all for the sake of truth must win in the end. Those people who have joined hands with the officers will regret their action. Let there be no mistake. Your land will come back to you knocking at your door."

For a few days Sardar concerned himself in proving the incorrectness of the statements made by the Government and showing up the emptiness of its threats :

"The Government says that it has sold 1400 acres of land and will sell another 5,000 acres. The Commissioner has also said that the value of the land has risen to 123 times the assessment. Let the Government declare at what price it has sold this land, and let it fix the land revenue assessment on the basis of the prices at which the land has been sold.

"The Parsis who have purchased the land will find men and women of their own community standing in their way in large numbers inviting them to shoot them before they use the land, to kill them before a plough touches their land, and then to use their bones as manure.

"If as you say in your press note the Pathans' conduct is exemplary, why don't you follow it ? Tell all your officers to model their conduct on that of the Pathans. Then it will not be necessary for you to take sureties from anyone.

"The Government does not like unity. My advice to the agriculturists is 'Do not spare anyone who deceives you. Tell him that we are all sailing in one boat. If you wish to spring a leak in that boat then you get out of the boat.' Our unity is for our protection, not for inflicting hardships on anybody else. Not to unite for the protection of oneself is equivalent to committing suicide. We put a fence around a tree in order to save it. We put yellow earth around wood in order to protect it from white ants. Why should then an agriculturist not build a fence for his own protection when he has to fight so powerful a Government ? You are not depriving anyone of his livelihood. You are merely cutting off your relations with him. You are refusing to accept any service from him. To impose such a boycott to my mind is the birthright of every community. The Government says, first pay up the land revenue assessment. The Chorashi Taluka has in

fact paid up the land revenue assessment. What justice have they done to it ? The announcement says that the Government has found many people to purchase the attached property and the attached land. Who, it is not stated. The world knows that among these purchasers are *chaprasis* and policemen and a few butchers who were specially persuaded to come from Surat. The land has been purchased by flatterers of the Government and relations of Government servants. What their reputation is everybody knows."

There was a strong criticism of the Government's press announcement, and newspapers in every State carried full news of Bardoli. Sardar's brother, Vithalbhai Patel, was at this time the President of the Central Assembly, and as one who was elected to the Assembly from Gujarat he followed the campaign with great interest. He presented the whole case to the Viceroy and indicated his own views on it. On seeing the Bombay Government's press announcement, he wrote a letter to Gandhiji forwarding with it a cheque for Rs 1000, and promising to pay a similar sum each month so long as the campaign continued. Many were surprised that although he was the President of the Central Legislature, he should show in this practical manner his sympathy towards a campaign which had been described as political and as a revolt against the Government. Many regarded it as wrong. Gandhiji said : "Who would not be encouraged on receiving Vithalbhai's letter ?" Indeed that letter delighted many people in Bardoli and encouraged several members of the Bombay Legislature to resign.

Before the 12th June, 63 Village Patels and 11 Talatis of Bardoli Taluka sent in their resignations. Ever since the commencement of the fight, Sardar had been going on attacking in a mild manner the Patels and the Talatis. Thus, for instance, he said :

"If you regard this Government as a bullock cart, it may be said to have two wheels, one the Patel and the other the Talati. Or you may say that they are the two bullocks of the Governmental bullock cart. Day and night these bullocks are whipped and abused. But now and again the Government lets them suck a little piece of molasses. It tastes sweet and so they forget the beating and the abuses, and start pulling the cart once again."

Gandhiji congratulated the Patels and Talatis who had

resigned and said : "In the final result it is sacrifices such as these which will bring independence to us."

12th of June was celebrated throughout the country with great enthusiasm as Bardoli Day. The people of Bardoli fasted for 24 hours and offered prayers. The young men in Bombay went from house to house and collected funds. The labourers of Ahmedabad sold receipts for an anna each and collected 1500 rupees. The office of the Bardoli Satyagraha Ashram was inundated with cheques and money orders. In addition to these donations which came voluntarily, efficient workers approached larger donors. They were persuaded to give large sums, and if they could not do so, to give their cars, or if they could not give them up altogether, to let them be used for the period of the conflict. In this way 4 motor cars were obtained for the workers of the Taluka and the total fund was augmented to two lakhs of rupees.

Section X

By this time the total number of forfeiture notices had reached the figure of 5,000 and the Government began selling the forfeited land by auction instead of by private negotiation. People in every village resolved neither to cultivate forfeited land purchased thus, nor to give any assistance by way of labour or in any other manner. A Parsi gentleman who did not belong to the Bardoli Taluka purchased some land. People of his own community and of the town to which he belonged resolved to boycott him, while Sardar in a speech in Bardoli on Bardoli Day issued a severe warning to those who had purchased or might purchase such forfeited land :

> "So long as a square foot of land belonging to any agriculturist or to any participant in this fight remains forfeited, this fight will continue. For the sake of such land, thousands of agriculturists are ready to die. This is not a charity performance for the Government to hand over land to some kerosene merchant from Bharuch. He who buys such land drinks the life-blood of agriculturists. Whoever does that will do well to give thought to the retribution which will be meted out to him by God in this life."

A Deputy Collector attempted to persuade a gentleman of Mota to pay up his land revenue, by using the following argument: "I have eaten the fruits of your orchard, how can I now auction that orchard? So for heaven's sake pay up your land revenue dues and I will not let anybody know." But the gentleman remained firm. This officer then approached an old pensioner: "Your friend has suggested that you should pay on his behalf." The pensioner was not so simple; he checked up and found that the officer had lied. Sardar went to Mota and referred to this incident in such shattering terms that the poor officer did not know which way to look. Said Sardar:

> "There are two kinds of flies, one, the bee, goes far into the jungle and collects honey from flowers; the other type goes and settles on filth and spreads filth. One gives honey to the world while the other spreads disease and death. It is this latter type which is at work amongst you; so I have heard. Do not let such come near you. If you will not let any filth and dirt remain amongst you, such flies will not dare to come anywhere near you."

A special Resident Magistrate had been appointed in Bardoli for this campaign. Offences had ceased to take place in the Taluka and if any offence was committed at all, it was committed by the men from the police force, or by the Pathans specially brought by the Government, or by Government officers themselves. But that would scarcely be a justification for leaving the Magistrate idle. The Collector had moved into Bardoli and a volunteer had been posted to keep a watch on his activities, some distance from his bungalow. The Collector did not like this, so he sent for him and handed him over to the Police Inspector. The latter released the volunteer after warning him. In the meantime his place was taken by a student from the Vidyapith, Dinkar Mehta, and another volunteer. Both were arrested. Their place was taken by the volunteer who had been warned and released before. So he was arrested once again. But the problem was to discover the particular Section of the Penal Code under which to take action against them. So they decided to charge them with wandering about without any ostensible purpose on a public street. The three young men were fined Rs 50 or sentenced to

rigorous imprisonment for two months. The Magistrate wrote in his judgment that the accused had been found wandering about in front of the Government bungalow in which the Collector was camping and were seen obstructing people who were going into the bungalow or coming out of it. He did not take the trouble to ascertain who had been obstructed or what was the nature of that obstruction. All the three preferred to go to jail rather than to pay the fine. The next day a large number of volunteers decided to take this opportunity of going to jail and assembled in front of this bungalow, but the Collector and the Police had had enough, and no one arrested them.

An agriculturist by name Bhawanbhai Hirabhai of the village of Nani Farod was charged with the offence of closing his doors with a view to preventing the Attachment Officer from carrying out his duties and with injuring him. His brave wife said that "if anyone committed such an offence, it was I, for I shut the doors." But she was not arrested, her husband was. In bidding her husband farewell, the brave woman used words which are worth recording:

> "Take care that no weak word escapes your lips. Tell the Jailor to give you as severe task as he desires. Do not think of me or the children. Be courageous, and answer all questions boldly and in a manly way. What a pity, they did not prosecute me or I would have shown them what the women of Bardoli can do. If they gave me a maund of food grains to grind, I would have ground a maund and a half and flung the flour in their face. My husband is quite ready to go to jail but he is of a meek nature, and does not know how to answer back. If I were jailed I would have given such firm and forthright replies that the Government and all its officers would not have easily forgotten them."

The part played during this struggle by the women of Bardoli was very great indeed, and many of them displayed in their conduct and demeanour bravery and courage no whit inferior in quality to that of this lady.

In the days of Satyagraha in Kheda, the Government had not opened a special Publicity Office. There was one in the days of the Borsad Satyagraha, but in Bardoli the Department worked with a vengeance, and issued numerous

leaflets everyday. They did not seem to realize that what they wrote more often than not showed up the Government in very poor light indeed. A Pathan was caught stealing salt ; the Publicity Officer reported that the police enquiry showed that this was a false case. Another Pathan attacked a Satyagrahi with a knife. It was difficult to deny the assault, so it was said that the Pathan had no intention of actually using his knife. A third Pathan was standing naked at a well. His conduct was explained away by simply asserting that the Pathan had no indecent intentions. And finally when these Pathans, whose conduct was said to be exemplary, were ordered to be removed forthwith from the Taluka, the Publicity Department said that the rainy season had now begun and there was no necessity for retaining the Pathans. A further argument in defence of the Pathans was : "Nobody complains when a Bania employs a Pathan as a Chowkidar. Why then should people blame the Government if it engages Pathans ?"

The Collector was playing his part and issued what was called, 'Wise Words to the Agriculturists'. These wise words, if anything, exceeded the imaginativeness of the Publicity Department. Sardar and his colleagues were described as people who were 'Duragrahis'*, determined to achieve evil. On another occasion they were described as outsiders who themselves had no land to lose in Bardoli Taluka and were merely interested in creating trouble for others. Commenting on Sardar's remark that before the forfeited land could be appropriated by any purchaser, rivulets of the blood of agriculturists and volunteers will have to flow and their bones converted into manure, the Collector commented that the lessons of philosophy and peace were apparently forgotten, and talk of peace had now ceased, and instead these would-be saints and devotees of peace and non-violence had become experts in creating difficulties for others, and talked of bloody battles, shootings, and of bones rotting.

* People who are obstinate adherents of falsehood and evil as opposed to 'Satyagrahis' who are firm in their adherence to truth.

Section XI

Shri K. M. Munshi, a Member of the Bombay Legislature at that time, wrote to the Governor of Bombay urging him to intercede before the matter assumed more serious proportions. The Governor sent him a fairly full reply, in which he stated that in Bardoli an attempt was being made to coerce the Government by the use of the weapon of Civil Disobedience. He then referred to the demand for an impartial inquiry, and claimed that a fresh inquiry, in fact, had been made into the complaints of the people. The Governor further contended that if a fresh examination were made, far from there being a reduction in the land revenue assessment, an increase might have to be ordered. He assured Shri Munshi that every Member of the Government was satisfied that the Government's decision was not only just but generous. " Why should the Government," he asked, " give up its undoubted right of administration to the decision of some independent committee ? I am anxious to meet the situation in every way possible, but no Government can concede the right of private individuals to usurp the functions of the Government, and no Government would be worth its name which allowed such a thing to happen."

In answer to this, Gandhiji once again, in a lucid article explained the stand of the people and exposed the fallacy of the Government's position :

> " The undoubted right of administration is the uncontrolled licence to bleed India to the point of starvation. The licence would be somewhat controlled if an independent committee were appointed to adjust the points in dispute between the people and the executive authority. Let it be noted that the independent committee does not mean a committee independent of the Government. It means a committee appointed by the Government of men known to be independent of official pressure, and authorized to hold the inquiry in the open with the right of the aggrieved people to be duly and effectively represented. But such an open inquiry means the death-knell of the secret autocratic revenue policy of the Government. Where in this modest demand of the people is there the slightest usurpation of the functions of the Government ?

"It is too late in the day to call Satyagraha unconstitutional. It will be unconstitutional when truth and its fellow — self-sacrifice — become unlawful. Lord Hardinge blessed the South African Satyagraha, and even the all-powerful Union Government gracefully bowed before it. In Champaran, the Government of Bihar accepted it too, and appointed an independent committee of inquiry. In Borsad, Vallabhbhai used the same weapon, and it was the present Governor himself who accepted its efficacy and gave the people relief. It is difficult to understand why such a weapon is now being regarded as illegal.

"Whether Satyagraha is against the law or not, it is irrelevant in the present instance. If the people's request is just, then the validity of that request is not affected in any way by the method adopted by the people in putting forward that request."

The reply given by the Governor did not satisfy even a staunch constitutionalist like Shri Munshi. He could not drop the matter, and asked for an interview with the Governor, and when he still remained unsatisfied he decided to see the state of affairs in Bardoli for himself. He visited many villages, attended many meetings, talked to a large number of men and women, and as a result of his personal investigation, came to the conclusion that the people could not but adopt this very graceful method of expressing their opposition to the Government. The very courageous letter which he wrote on the 17th of June to the Governor, will always be regarded as an important document in the history of this campaign. It was published in all the newspapers of the country. A few extracts from this letter would be of interest:

"80,000 men, women and children are inspired by a determined spirit of organized opposition. Your *japti** officer has to travel miles before he can get a shave. Your officer's car which got stuck would have remained in the mud but for Vallabhbhai, officially styled 'agitator living on Bardoli'. Garda† to whom lands worth thousands have been sold for a nominal amount cannot get even a scavenger for his house. The Collector gets no conveyance at the railway station without Vallabhbhai's sanction. In the few villages which I visited, not a man, or woman, was either sorry for the step taken or is shaken in his or her faith,

* Attachment.
† The Parsi gentleman who purchased some of the forfeited lands.

and as Vallabhbhai passed through village after village I saw men, women and children coming out to greet him in spontaneous homage; I saw illiterate women, old and young, in their tatters placing on his forehead the auspicious mark of victory, laying at his feet, for their sacred cause, their hard-earned rupee or two, and singing in their rustic accents songs of 'the misdeeds of the hapless Government'. It is obvious that the official reports of an artificial agitation forced on an unwilling people are, to put it very mildly, grossly inaccurate. Men laugh at your Government's attempts at terrorization. They have survived all these attempts and are prepared to brave more. In order to save their beloved cattle 80,000 men, women and children have locked themselves up with their cattle in small and insanitary houses for over three months. As I passed through villages, silent, empty and deserted with sentinels posted at different ends, I saw women peeping through barred windows, and on being re-assured they opened the doors. I went inside and I saw the darkness, the stench, the filth, and men, women and children herded together for months in the same room with their beloved cattle miserable, lacerated, and grown pale with disease. As I heard their determination to remain in that condition for months rather than abandon their cattle to the tender mercies of the *japti* officer, I could not help but think that the imagination which conceived the dire *japti* methods, the severity with which they were enforced and the inhuman policy they represented were difficult to find outside the pages of a history of medieval times. The cheap sneers of lofty bureaucrats, the disproportionately severe sentences for technical offences, the thunders of arrogant proclamations, and the official sabre-rattlings have ceased to excite anything but ridicule. The only reply which lies in my power to give to the Government is to resign my seat in the Council and to appeal to my presidency-wide constituency ‡ to indicate their verdict on this issue."

Shri Munshi took upon himself the task of subjecting the methods of terrorization practised by the Government in Bardoli to a regular judicial examination by a Committee. The Government declined to assist such a Committee. But the Committee took special care to see that their conclusions were supported by overwhelming and unimpeachable evidence.

‡ He was returned from the Bombay University Graduates' Constituency.

Section XII

Sir Purushottamdas Thakurdas and other Members of the Indian Merchants Chamber of Commerce also endeavoured to bring about a settlement. They went to Sabarmati Ashram to meet Gandhiji in order to ascertain the immediate demands of the Satyagrahis, and requested Sardar also to be present. After seeing Gandhiji, they went in a deputation to meet the Governor in Poona. The Governor insisted on the agriculturists paying up the increased land revenue assessment, or if they would not do so, on some third party depositing in the Government's treasury a sum equivalent to that increase on their behalf. Only then would the Government be prepared to order a fresh enquiry. Sir Purushottamdas Thakurdas then met the Sardar. Both felt that there was no possibility of finding a common meeting ground between the Government and the Satyagrahis. Shri Lalji Narain thereupon resigned from the Legislature, stating in his letter of resignation that it was wholly unjustifiable to insist on the payment of the enhanced assessment before conceding the demand for an independent impartial enquiry.

Lest the people weaken in their determination on hearing of the failure of these talks, Sardar exhorted them in his inimitable manner :

> "You know what happens if you pluck and taste a mango before it is ripe, it will only set your teeth on edge; but if you let the fruit ripen, it will drop off of its own accord in due season and your patience will be rewarded with its delicious flavour and sweet juice. The time for compromise or settlement has not yet arrived. There will be a satisfactory settlement only when the Government's attitude changes. When there is a change of heart, we shall immediately find that bitterness and hostility, which now move the Government to action, have been replaced by sympathy and understanding."

He repeatedly told all who were anxious to mediate not to be in undue hurry. The people had been awakened from their apathy and it would be a pity to pour cold water on their enthusiasm.

The leaders of the Moderate Party also felt that the time had arrived when they too must study the campaign

and express an opinion. In the third week of June, Pandit Hridaynath Kunzru, Shri Vaze, Editor of the *Servant of India*, and Thakkar Bapa * came to Bardoli. They decided to restrict their inquiry solely to the revenue question, whether the new assessment was justifiable or not on economic grounds. They refused to go into the hardships inflicted on the people by the repressive policy of the Government, or into the organized resistance of the people, or into the constructive work which had been started in Bardoli. They visited a large number of villages, made thorough personal enquiries, and came to the conclusion that the demand for a fresh enquiry was fully justified, and that the recent announcement that the revision settlement of the Viramgam Taluka would be reconsidered made the case for the reconsideration of the settlement of Bardoli Taluka unanswerable. Their report was wholly in accord with their objective and independent approach. It contained neither a single irrelevant fact, nor a single unnecessary adjective, and as a result it carried great weight with leaders of different political parties.

Pandit Motilal Nehru in a long statement to the press said :

> "I gather that the Bombay Government is prepared to agree to a fresh enquiry but they insist on the payment of all revenues due under the present assessment before holding the inquiry. This is an extraordinary position to take up. If the assessment is *prima facie* wrong and unjust and merits reconsideration, it is manifestly absurd and illogical to demand payment of any dues under it."

Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru said that in the very interests of the Government's prestige,

> "It appears to me to be necessary that an independent inquiry should be made not only into the grievances of the people of Bardoli with regard to the enhanced assessment but also into the allegations made regarding the methods employed in enforcing payment and dealing with the situation generally."

All the Indian newspapers of the country wholeheartedly supported the Satyagrahis, while with the exception of *The Times of India* of Bombay, the Anglo-

* Another member of the Servants of India Society and one of the greatest protagonists of Harijans and their rights.

Indian press was either indifferent or silent. The *Pioneer* of Allahabad and the *Statesman* of Calcutta broke away from the tradition of the Anglo-Indian press to side with the Government and supported the Bardoli Satyagraha. "The main point," said the *Pioneer*, "that must be made and made without delay, is that no impartial observer of the Bardoli dispute possessed of the plain facts of the case can resist the conclusion that the peasants have got right on their side and that their claim for an examination of the enhanced assessment by an impartial tribunal is just, reasonable and fair."

It would have been impossible for any reasonable Government to ignore such ever-growing consensus of opinion. But the Bombay Government still kept marking time.

Section XIII

The situation had reached a critical stage in Bardoli. There was unprecedented public awakening throughout India which showed itself in huge mass meetings and district conferences, in processions organized by students and collections made by men, women and children throughout the country.

The District Conferences in Surat, Bharuch, Nadiad and Ahmedabad, attended by thousands of peasants, registered the support of these districts to the Satyagraha. The Presidents of all except the Bharuch Conference were 'outsiders'; Jairamdas presided at Surat, Khadilkar at Nadiad and Kelkar at Ahmedabad, and they all promised to carry the message of Bardoli to their own provinces. The Sardar surpassed himself at each succeeding Conference. At Bharuch he said: "If the Government mean to devour the land, I warn them that the conflagration will spread over the whole of Gujarat and they will realize not a farthing in Gujarat next year." In Ahmedabad, he said, "The Government may think it has far greater strength than Ravana had, but let the mighty Government remember that it has to deal not with one Sita but 80,000 Satyagrahis." People followed

Sardar wherever he went and listened to him as if they were infatuated. Vallabhbhai spoke like one inspired.

This rising tide of public awakening aroused many a sleeper from his deep slumber. Even *The Times of India* at last woke up to the realities of the situation and sent its special correspondent to Bardoli to see if he could make the truth more palatable. This correspondent appeared to be very annoyed with the agriculturists for their determination to lose their all for the sake of their honour. He did not seem to like the discipline, the training and the obedience of the volunteers and could scarcely bear to see the great devotion of the volunteers, men and women, to the Sardar. He had assumed that the 250 volunteers in Bardoli were having a good time at other people's expense and were leading a lazy life in the so-called Independence Camps. But he was disillusioned. He saw that even in Vallabhbhai's absence there was nothing but work, work and more work in the Ashram. The volunteers were not just soft persons but people who led a rigorous life and lived on simple fare. He saw many old hardened servants of the people. He met a number of students of the Gujarat Vidyapith. In the Ashram he saw that the people ate meagre food and only at night did they get any vegetables. He saw Gandhiji's son, Ramdas, also eating at the common kitchen and rushing to his work. He could not help seeing the enormous amount of hardships which the people were undergoing. The villagers of Bardoli had unquestionably passed through a very terrible test. He was astonished that in spite of all this there had not broken out any epidemic. He was horrified at the terrible condition of the cattle and the various diseases from which they were suffering ; but he had in him neither the ability nor the sympathy to understand the reason. His comment was that Vallabhbhai had perpetrated downright cruelty on men and beasts ! The articles which this correspondent wrote were given prominence under flaming headlines such as : 'Peasant Rebellion in Bardoli', 'Bolshevik Regime in Bardoli' and so on. He warned the Government that Vallabhbhai was out to establish a Soviet regime in Bardoli with himself playing the part of Lenin, and that so long as

Vallabhbhai's hold on the Bardoli villagers lasted, there could be no peace. But facts could not be kept back. The substance of what he said was that Vallabhbhai Patel had virtually paralysed the Taluka's revenue administration; that eighty Patels and nineteen Talatis had resigned; few employees were left who had not sent in their resignations, and there was no reason to assume that those who remained were loyal to the Government; that Vallabhbhai had so misled the people that everyone was sure that the Government would never be able to recover the increased land revenue assessment. Apart from this his articles bore an eloquent testimony to the amazing unity of the Taluka, the extraordinary devotion of the women to Sardar, the very strict discipline of the volunteers, the remarkable organization of the camps, and the incredible hardships which the people were undergoing.

One result of these articles was that at long last the British lion woke up from its sleep. In reporting on the Bardoli Satyagraha in the House of Commons, Lord Winterton said: "It is true that Vallabhbhai Patel has met with some success, but now legal steps are beginning to be taken against agriculturists who do not pay up the land revenue assessment." Sir Michael O'Dwyer fretted and fumed and insisted that the law should be enforced with full vigour. On the 13th of July the Governor of Bombay went to Simla to see the Viceroy. Lest the people might say that the Government was surrendering in any way, the Information Department of the Government wrote: "It is His Excellency's obvious duty to uphold the supremacy of the law. But it is also his duty, as the representative of the King Emperor to see that hardship and suffering is not inflicted on so large a number of persons." While the Governor was discussing the whole question with the Viceroy in Simla, the Sardar was paying a visit to the Ahmedabad District Conference, and it was while he was speaking to the large audience at this Conference that he received an invitation from the Governor through the Commissioner saying that the Governor was arriving in Surat on the 18th morning and that Sardar together with

12 representatives of the Bardoli Satyagrahis should meet him there. Sardar accordingly met the Governor on the 18th accompanied by 12 others. They had two sessions of three hours each. The Governor was adamant about the payment of the enhanced assessment or in the alternative payment by a third party on behalf of the Satyagrahis of a deposit equal to the amount of the enhancement. On other points too there were difficulties and no compromise seemed possible. In the end, Sardar requested the Governor to provide him with a statement of the terms the Government was prepared to offer, so that he could examine them carefully in consultation with his colleagues, before giving his final reply. Accordingly, the Government intimated the following as the essential conditions of a comprehensive settlement :

> " In the first place all the land revenue assessment should be paid up, or the difference between the new and the old assessment should be deposited in the Government Treasury on behalf of the agriculturists. Secondly, the movement to withhold payment of land revenue assessment should immediately be stopped. If these two conditions are accepted the Government would be prepared to take steps to set up a special enquiry into the alleged errors of the official appreciation and calculation of facts and figures either by a Revenue Officer unconnected with the present case, or by a Revenue Officer with a Judicial Officer associated with him, it being the duty of the latter to decide any disputed questions of facts or figures."

Not even British newspapers, like the *Pioneer* or the *Statesman,* considered the conditions to be reasonable. Gandhiji said : " It seems to me that the Government has not really been converted, and it is foolish to talk of a change of heart. That heart has now become harder than stone." For a Satyagrahi, however, it would have been wrong to spurn even this mockery of an offer, since he must explore every possibility of a settlement. Sardar, therefore, made one more effort, and in his reply he indicated what he could advise the people to accept :

(1) All the Satyagrahi prisoners should be released.

(2) All forfeited lands, whether sold or unsold, should be returned to their lawful owners.

(3) Proper market price should be given to the owners of cattle and other movable property which, it was contended, had been sold at ridiculously low prices.

(4) All dismissals and other punishments of Government servants during the struggle should be cancelled or remitted.

(5) As regards the enquiry, even an Official Committee would be acceptable so long as it was made clear that the enquiry would be open, impartial and judicial in character, before which it would be open for people to appear by counsel, if they chose.

Politicians and the press of every shade of opinion — *The Times of India* being the solitary exception — supported the stand taken by the Satyagrahis. *The Leader* characterized Government's conditions as tantamount to a demand for complete surrender by the Bardoli peasants. The *New India* (Dr. Besant's paper) said: "If Birkenhead remains obstinate then an agitation should be set up in Parliament to make him change his mind." *The Hindu* wrote: "The Governor has given up an excellent opportunity of securing satisfactory settlement", while the *Pioneer* criticized the Government's terms as a case of "putting the cart before the horse". Undeterred by this unanimous condemnation, the Governor of Bombay, Sir Leslie Wilson, stuck to his self-imposed task of upholding the law, and when he opened the Legislative Council on the 23rd July, he threatened dire consequences if the members representing the Surat District failed to fulfil his condition within 14 days. He said:

"If the main point at issue is not the justice or the injustice of the revised revenue assessment in Bardoli but whether the writ of His Majesty the King Emperor is to run in a portion of His Majesty's domains, the Government was prepared to meet the situation with all the power which it possessed. If, however, the only point at issue was the justice or the injustice of the revised assessment, the Government is prepared to submit the whole case to a full, open and independent enquiry, after the revenue now due to the Government has been paid and the present agitation has entirely ceased."

He added:

"It is, however, my duty to make it clear that if these conditions are not accepted, and consequently a settlement is not secured, the Government will, in order that there shall be full compliance with the law, take what action they consider desirable

and necessary, and will utilize all the powers at their command to ensure that the statutory authority of the Government is maintained in every way."

On the same day, the Indian papers carried the speech of Lord Winterton in the House of Commons, which showed clearly who had inspired Sir Leslie's speech.

These speeches were a measure of the anger and resentment the British Government felt at the success of the non-violent movement. Vallabhbhai had reason to congratulate himself, for with the help of the 80,000 people who had accepted his leadership, without a single act of violence he had compelled the Government to show itself in its true colours. He could indeed have challenged the Government to do its worst and to crush the agitation if it had the strength to do so. But he was as humble as he was conscious of his strength. He put out a short statement to the press in which he was content to reiterate his demand and to warn the people not to be misled by empty phrases or be deterred by threats :

"I must confess that I was unprepared for the threatening address of His Excellency the Governor. But threats apart, I want to remove the confusion that the speech is consciously or unconsciously intended to create. The Governor says in effect that if Civil Disobedience is the issue, he is prepared to meet it with all the power which the Government possesses, but 'if the only question to be dealt with is the justice or injustice of the reassessment, then the Government is prepared to submit the whole case after the revenue now due to the Government has been paid and the present agitation ceases, to a full, open and independent inquiry as outlined in the statement which has been published.' I venture to point out that Civil Disobedience had never been the issue. I know that there is no unanimity of opinion amongst all parties about the wisdom or legitimacy of Civil Disobedience. I have my own opinion on the subject. But the Bardoli people are not fighting in order to have the right of Civil Disobedience vindicated. They are fighting through Civil Disobedience — or whatever name the method adopted may be given — to induce the Government either to waive the enhancement, or if they are not convinced that the enhancement is improperly made, to appoint an impartial, independent body to enquire into the matter. The only question therefore is that of justice or injustice of the reassessment. And if the Government are prepared to have that question examined by a 'full, open and independent inquiry',

they must surely accept the logical consequence of the proposition they themselves lay down, namely, not to insist upon the payment of the enhancement which is in dispute and to restore the people to the condition they occupied before the struggle commenced. I warn the public also about the qualifying clause that is attached to 'the full, open and independent inquiry,' viz., 'as outlined in the statement which has been published'. This is a dangerous clause. For what is promised in the Surat communication is not 'a full, open and independent inquiry', but a mockery of it. The Surat statement contemplates a very limited inquiry to be conducted by a revenue officer assisted by a judicial officer to investigate 'errors of calculation and fact', a totally different thing from 'a full, open and independent inquiry'. I hope therefore that undeterred by the threats contained in the Governor's deliverance, public opinion will concentrate only on the one point that I have mentioned."

Equally instructive was Gandhiji's article in *Young India*. He emphasized the reasonableness of Sardar's attitude and warned everyone against the attempt of the Government to cause confusion :

"I venture to suggest that he would be guilty of a gross breach of trust if he asked for or took less. In his proposal there is no humiliation intended or implied of the Government. His reasonableness and anxiety to come to any honourable compromise limits him to the barest minimum. For it is surely open to him to raise the whole question of the revenue policy of the Government and ask for damages for the terrible losses suffered by the people during the past four months without any fault of theirs.

"Two courses are open to the Government, to bow to the public opinion of all India and accept Vallabhbhai's offer or to uphold a false prestige. If it is not too late, I appeal to the Bombay Government to follow the first."

The sabre-rattling of the Government created excitement everywhere in the country. Military officers visited Bardoli to carry out local reconnaissance, and arrangements were said to have been made for the despatch of tarpaulins, tents and other stores required for setting up military camps. Gandhiji asked himself what people would do if they found that the limit of their hardships was reached, and he himself gave the reply :

"If the people find it impossible to put up with further hardships, they should abandon the land which they have hitherto

looked upon as their own and move away elsewhere. It is wisdom to abandon houses in a locality in which plague cases have occurred or are likely to occur. Tyranny is a form of plague. If there is any possibility of that tyranny making us angry or weakening us, it is but the path of wisdom to run away from that spot of tyranny."

Outside Bardoli things were very different. The threats issued by the Governor and Earl Winterton had irritated some people and frightened others. The extremists welcomed with joy the speech of the Governor for they saw in it an opportunity for a real "show down" for independence and for a real test of the Satyagrahi. On the other hand there was a timid section of the people, thoroughly frightened at the possibility of all manner of atrocities being perpetrated. Some, therefore, who had hitherto been supporting the campaign and had considered the people's demands to be reasonable were dismayed at the threatening clouds. The editor of a well-known newspaper of Bombay gave expression to this view in an article :

"Shri Vallabhbhai Patel says that there is no question of Civil Disobedience in Bardoli. Nevertheless, the fear expressed by Sir Leslie Wilson is very true and so Shri Vallabhbhai Patel should accept the terms offered by the Governor."

Gandhiji warned both the extremists and the terrified moderates :

"The time has not yet come," he said, "to start even limited sympathetic Civil Disobedience Movement throughout the country. Bardoli has yet to prove its mettle. If it can stand the last test, if the Government goes to the farthest limit, nothing that I or Vallabhbhai can do will stop the spread of Satyagraha or limit the issue to a bonafide re-inquiry and its logical consequences. The limit of Satyagraha will be determined by the capacity of the country as a whole for self-sacrifice and suffering. If that great experiment has to be tried, no one will be able to stop its coming; but as I understand the real essence of Satyagraha, it is the duty of both Vallabhbhai and myself to keep the Satyagraha to the original limits in spite of the Government's provocations.

"The fact is that Satyagraha pre-supposes the living presence and guidance of God. The leader of the Satyagraha does not depend upon his own strength but on the strength of God. He acts as the Voice within guides him. Very often, therefore, what are so-called practical politics are unrealities to him, though in the

end they prove to be the most practical politics. All this may sound foolish and visionary on the eve of what bids fair to become the toughest battle that India has hitherto had to face. But I would be untrue to myself and to the nation if I failed to say what I feel to be the truth. If the people of Bardoli are what Vallabhbhai believes them to be, all will be well, in spite of the use of all the weapons the Government may have at their command. Let us wait and see. To the Members of the Legislature and others who are interested in compromise, I would request that they take care not to take a single weak step in the hope of saving the people of Bardoli. They are safe in the hands of God."

Sardar's arrest was regarded by everyone as a foregone conclusion. Gandhiji felt that it would be better to go to Bardoli before Sardar was arrested so that Sardar could have an opportunity to give him whatever instructions he thought necessary. Accordingly on the 2nd of August he arrived in Bardoli. He was agreeably surprised to see that while there was tense excitement in the country over the fate of Bardoli, in Bardoli itself there was no sign of anything unusual. All the people, men and women, had complete confidence in God and were prepared to carry out unquestioningly Sardar's orders. Gandhiji's visit only made them more devoted to Sardar than ever.

Section XIV

Sardar went to Poona to negotiate with the Government. As a Satyagrahi he could never refuse to negotiate although he had no faith in the outcome. Mahadevbhai in his *Story of Bardoli* describes these negotiations :

The Government realized that though it had addressed its ultimatum to the Surat Legislative Members, it had ultimately to treat with Vallabhbhai. Let it be said to the credit of the Surat Members, as of all the other Members of the Legislature, that they refused until the last to give any undertaking or to commit Vallabhbhai in any way. While informal discussions were going on, it was felt that the Government were no less for a settlement than were the Surat members, but every one seemed to be at a loss to hit upon a formula that would preserve the Government's prestige. A colourless draft was framed but it was not acceptable to Sir Chunilal Mehta. He had been discussing with other members of the Government and it was in the evening that he came

with the draft of a letter to be addressed by the Surat Members to the Revenue Member:

> "We are glad to be able to say that we are in a position to inform the Government that the conditions laid down by His Excellency the Governor in his opening speech to the Council dated 24th July will be fulfilled."

"What" wondered Vallabhbhai, "can be the meaning of the M. L. C.s signing a letter saying that the conditions *will* be fulfilled, when the conditions are expected to be fulfilled *before* any inquiry is granted? And if any one can fulfil the conditions it is we, and we say that it is impossible for us to pay even the *old* assessment until *after* the inquiry is announced."

"That is not your concern," said Sir Chunilal. "If the Members are agreeable to addressing the letter, you need not worry as to *how, when* and *by whom* the conditions will be fulfilled. You will pay the old assessment *after* the inquiry is announced."

Frankly this diplomacy was beyond our wits. Munshi who was with the Sardar throughout those fateful hours, and Shivdasani, submitted alternative drafts which were unacceptable to Sir Chunilal Mehta who swore by the Government draft. Fearing that there would again be an impasse, Munshi started discussing the other conditions. As a result of this discussion, agreement could be reached, at a very late hour in the night, about those other conditions, e.g., restoration of lands, release of prisoners, and reinstatement of the Talatis. It is needless to add that Vallabhbhai waived the clause about indemnity if there was agreement on all the other points. But the main point was the draft, and Munshi left at a late hour, hoping some satisfactory formula might be reached. Swami Anand and I happened to be with Vallabhbhai during those anxious hours. Sir Chunilal saw no less than we that agreement was impossible and negotiations must break down, and he retired sorely disappointed. Until the small hours of the morning we sat discussing the draft of a letter to be sent to His Excellency the Governor explaining why the negotiations had to break down. At night I got up still thinking of Sir Chunilal's formula. I woke up Vallabhbhai and said: "After all, Vallabhbhai, it is an innocuous, if meaningless, formula. Neither we nor the Surat Members give an undertaking. If Government must have that meaningless formula, we can afford to give that sop to Cerberus."

"But it is a compromise with truth," said Vallabhbhai.

"I agree", said I, "but it is a compromise on the part of the Government."

"But won't we be party to it?"

"No", said I, "Not if we plainly tell the Government what they are doing."

"Well, then, are you prepared to tell Sir Chunilal that the Government are compromising with truth?"

"Certainly. I will do so forthwith."

"But, look here," said Vallabhbhai, "I frankly do not see this game. Why don't they face facts? What do you think Bapu would say? What do you say, Swami?"

Never was the Sardar higher in my estimation than that day. His anxiety to have the opinion of humble companions like Swami and myself seemed to be as great as his anxiety to find out what 'Bapu' (Gandhiji) would think of his attitude.

Thus fortified in his own conviction which was clear, that there was neither compromise of truth nor of the principle of the Master on *our* part, he said: "But will the Surat Members sign this meaningless formula?"

"I dare say", said I. "They also must see through the game, and Sir Chunilal seemed to be sure that they should have no objection to subscribing to that formula."

"Well then", said the Sardar, "if they sign it, I will have no objection. But we should make our position once again clear to Sir Chunilal and tell him plainly that the Government are compromising with truth."

I went to Sir Chunilal and explained to him the whole thing. "It is well that you make your position clear. I shall make it all clear to the Government," he said. As we were discussing the thing, Vallabhbhai looked in, again emphasized the point of compromise and expressed his fear that the Government might not after all be prepared to accept the 'information' that the proposed letter sought to convey. The draft was too good or too bad for the Government to accept. But Sir Chunilal seemed to have no doubt. The ways of governments are inscrutable, and the moment Vallabhbhai said that if the Surat Members had no objection to signing the document, he would have none, the settlement was complete. Let it be said in justice to Sir Chunilal Mehta that he knew the mind of the Government better than any one of us and his patriotism had, at this great moment, got the better of his officialdom. He knew that he was serving the cause of his country and he did not seem to mind that the Government of which he was a member would ultimately be discovered to be clutching at the shadow of prestige. It was the way of governments all the world over.

But if the Government were content to be satisfied with clutching at the shadow of prestige, Vallabhbhai could not be content without the substance. All that he wanted was a full, independent, judicial inquiry and a restoration of the *status quo*.

The Government were perfectly agreeable, provided here too they could have their prestige intact. The inquiry in the very words suggested by Vallabhbhai including an unconscious grammatical slip — minus the clause about coercive measures — was to be announced immediately the Members had addressed that diplomatic letter, and the restorative measures would be taken on the Members writing a formal letter to the Revenue Member to reinstate Talatis, restore lands, and release prisoners. The compensation clause cancelling all penalties and compensating the Valod liquor seller was not to be included in the letter as the thing would be done by executive orders. For Vallabhbhai nothing more was necessary. He was there to win the substance and not the shadow and he had done so fully and entirely.

The rest of the story is briefly told. The letter was signed by the Surat Members. At the same time at the instance of Sir Chunilal Mehta, K. M. Munshi and several others went to Surat to co-operate with the Collector in getting all sold lands re-transferred to the original owners. The purchasers of these lands were few and far between, but they had to be hunted out in time so that the transaction might be complete before the fateful 6th of August had expired. The Collector who had often declared that sold lands would never be restored had been conveniently transferred at the moment and the new Collector ultimately persuaded the purchasers to return the lands. Of course they had been given all sorts of stupid promises by the Commissioner and the Collector, and it was not an easy job to make them disgorge their ill-gotten gains. Munshi gave in a private letter an amusing account of how cleverly the Collector had managed. On the day the letter was sent to the Revenue Member the inquiry was announced exactly in the terms Gandhiji and Vallabhbhai had suggested, and on the Members of the Legislative Council writing to the Revenue Member about the restoration clauses, the Government announced that orders would be passed to restore all lands, release all prisoners and reinstate the Talatis if they applied in the proper form. Vallabhbhai now expressed his satisfaction with what the Government had done and he publicly thanked all concerned including the Government. He further issued instructions to the peasants in which he told them: "Now we have to pay up the old assessment, not the enhanced one. I hope you will keep yourselves in readiness to pay the old assessment." He wrote this obviously in anticipation of the prisoners' release and was amazed that the release had not yet been announced. But this was because the Government were yet doubtful if Vallabhbhai had accepted the settlement as satisfactory to himself and the Satyagrahis, and they deputed the Collector to ascertain the fact.

Vallabhbhai said that he had already expressed his satisfaction in a Gujarati bulletin addressed to the peasants; the Collector wired to the Government to correct the misunderstanding and the next morning all the prisoners were released. As to the Talatis the application for reinstatement drafted by Vallabhbhai was quite acceptable to the Collector and he immediately issued orders to take them back. This done, it was for the people to fulfil their part of the contract. They soon began to pay the old assessment and in about a month's time there were no arrears of revenue.

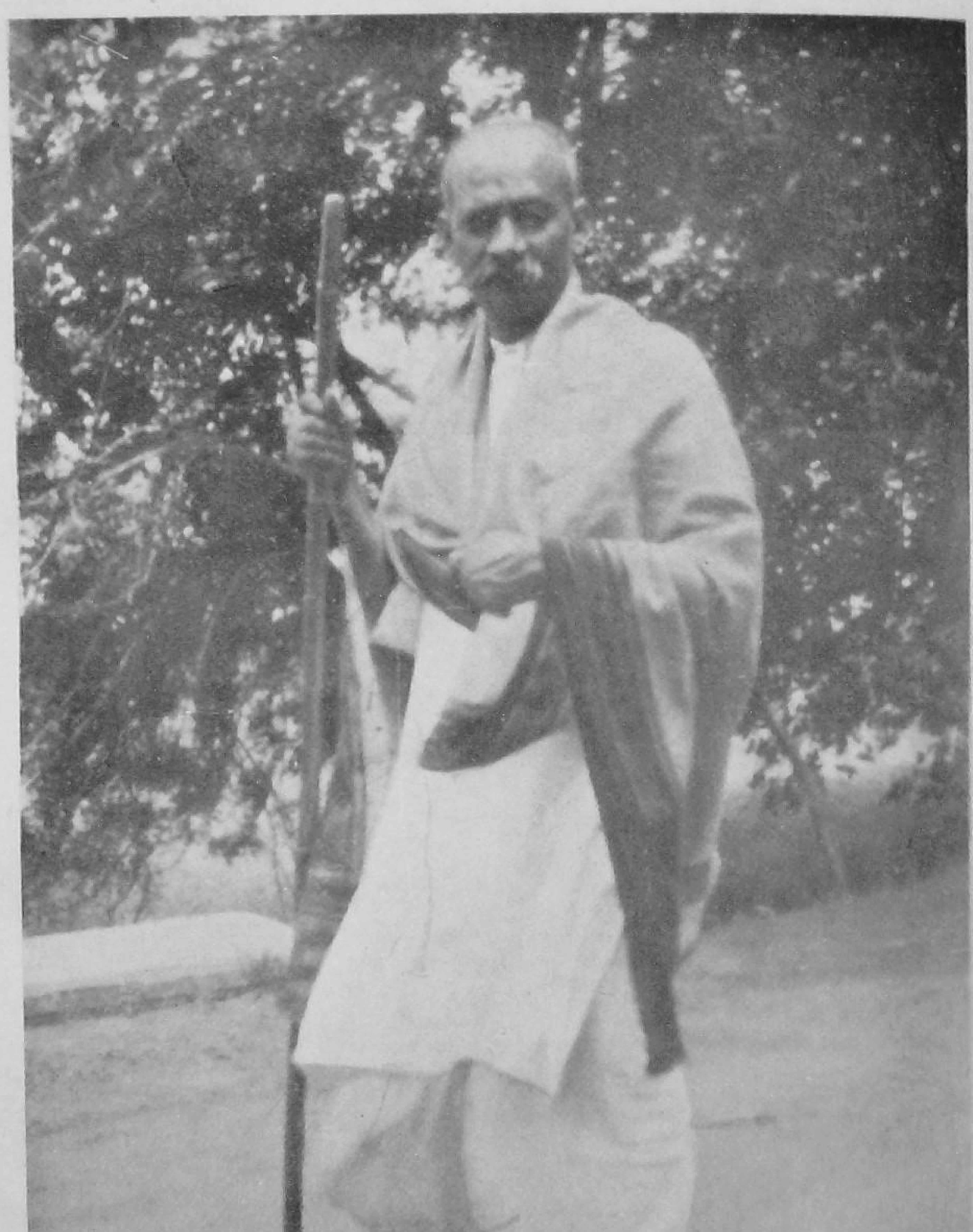
Thus ended a campaign which was pursued by a peaceful peasantry with truth and patient suffering for their weapons against an enemy who could any day have crushed them. But the Bardoli peasants had shown to the world that truth and non-violence cannot be crushed. Bardoli was Sardar's third achievement. The Nagpur victory was the vindication of a technical right. The Borsad victory, won after a very short and swift campaign, only redressed a local grievance, and though no victory could have been more signal and decisive, the campaign because of its swiftness failed to draw much of the nation's attention. The Bardoli triumph was unique in that it compelled not only the nation's but the whole Empire's attention, and the justice and moderation of the people's demand practically won the nation's sympathy. It was unique in that it was fought by perhaps one of the meekest of the Talukas in India, in that it affected the Revenue Department, whose orders, it was believed up to now, not even the gods could question, and in that it compelled a mighty Government pledged to crush the movement to yield within a fortnight of the pledge. It was unique in that the leader of the campaign shed all idea of personal prestige, and also in that the Governor of the province, who for a moment seemed to listen to dictation from Whitehall, did all that he personally could to bring about peace. Even the camouflage that he seems to have consented to was in the worthy cause of peace. That is why Gandhiji and Vallabhbhai emphasized in their speeches throughout the week after the settlement the duty of congratulating the Governor as much as that of congratulating those who had won the campaign.

Section XV

Like a flash of lightning, the story of the settlement reached every part of the country and Sardar was inundated with telegrams of congratulations, and newspapers throughout the country vied with each other in writing laudatory articles. The bureaucracy, of course, was

not happy that a settlement should have been reached. They started again their game of prevarication. Difficulties were created in regard to return of fines imposed upon the agriculturists during the campaign. Those Satyagrahis whose movable property had not been confiscated and who had not paid anything until the date of the settlement were not called upon to pay the 25 per cent fine ; how then should it be regarded as reasonable to call upon those whose movable property was confiscated and who had lost their cattle, to pay this 25 per cent fine ? Then, the composition of the Enquiry Committee was altered from what had been agreed upon in the discussions between Sir Chunilal Mehta and Sardar. Sardar did not like all this. He said to the Revenue Member : "I can understand the Government's difficulty in altering the composition of the Committee once it had been announced, but if you are not able to refund the 25 per cent fine, the Satyagrahis will be quite prepared to do without the Enquiry Committee." Once again the Governor had to intervene. He said that there would be no difficulty in refunding the fine if Vallabhbhai accepted the appointment of the Committee. This proved again that, while the Governor was anxious for a settlement, his advisers were only concerned with raising difficulties. To make assurance doubly sure, Sardar wrote to the Revenue Member and stated, "I am accepting the appointment of this Committee on the clear understanding that if I feel at any time that the work is not being carried out justly or that at the end of the enquiry I feel that the Committee is unable to come to a satisfactory or just decision consistent with the evidence collected, I shall be free to resume the campaign."

Then started victory celebrations in Bardoli, in Surat and in other cities of Gujarat. They were as magnificent as they were inspiring. At the time of the Nagpur and Borsad celebrations Gandhiji was in jail, but this time he was out, and he attended many of the meetings, much to Sardar's embarrassment. He felt very shy to accept addresses in Gandhiji's presence in Bardoli, and said that the time for addresses of congratulation had not yet come. It would come only when the pledge of 1922 was honoured.



Successful Leader of Bardoli

"There are many unknown persons in India who are not merely strict adherents of the principle of non-violence, but who actually practise it. They are not destined to receive publicity. But those who do not adhere to it to the full extent are being publicized now. To talk of practising non-violence is wholly inappropriate in the mouth of someone so insignificant as I. It is like someone who, while at the foot of Himalayas, talks of having reached the top. Admittedly one who talks of reaching the top of Mount Everest while still at its foot is somewhat less foolish than one who talks of doing so while still at Cape Comorin. For myself I have been privileged to put before you in my own inadequate way the message which I myself received from Gandhiji."

Gandhiji remarked :

"Many a time Sardar has told you as well as the Government that so long as there is no change of heart among the officials the settlement will remain impossible. Now that there has been a settlement, there must have been somewhere some change of heart. Let the Satyagrahi not even in his dream say to himself arrogantly that whatever has been achieved has been the result of his own strength. A Satyagrahi means one who regards himself as nothing. The strength of a Satyagrahi is the strength of God. In his mouth the only appropriate remark is that God is the strength of the weak. Only if the Satyagrahi gives up the arrogance of his own strength will God help him. Let us, therefore, thank God if there has been some change of heart ; indeed thanks alone are not enough.

"We must, I think, believe that there has been a change of heart in the Governor. If that had not happened, it is difficult to say what would have been the consequences. We, of course, were not worried about the consequences, for we had taken a pledge and were not afraid of whatever pressure might have been placed on us. We may well celebrate the victory today and be glad, but I want you to realize that the Governor is responsible for the victory. If he had continued to be as stiff as he was in his speech before the Legislature and had not shown a desire for compromise, he could have, had he so wished, accomplished even the physical destruction of Bardoli.

"You have taken a pledge which makes it impossible for you under any provocation either to hit back or to give in. Therefore, if the Governor had so desired he could have razed Bardoli to the ground. Of course, if he had done so, it would have been a victory for Bardoli, but that would have been a different kind of victory. We would not have been alive to celebrate that victory but India and the world would have celebrated it. Let us, however, not wish that any officer would prove so hard-hearted. Let us not forget

that those of us who are assembled here today in this mammoth meeting have taken the great pledge of 1922."

And these are Sardar's words :

"The citizens of Ahmedabad in giving me this address have described me as the chief disciple of Gandhiji. I only wish that I deserved that description; I know, however, that I am not worthy of it. I do not know how often I shall have to be reborn in order to achieve that distinction. Truly you have been so carried away by your affection for me, and have used such exaggerated expressions about me that I can scarcely accept them. You have all heard of the Bhil disciple of Dronacharya in Mahabharata. He never had the good fortune of learning directly under Dronacharya, but he used to worship an earthen figure of his Guru. And it was through his devotion that he acquired all that Dronacharya had to teach. Indeed he learnt thus even more than what other disciples of Dronacharya ever learnt. How is that to be explained ? The explanation is simple. He worshipped his Guru with a pure heart, devotedly and with complete faith. He had thus the necessary basic qualities. In my case, I have access to the Guru whose disciple you say I am. So far from being his chief disciple, I doubt if I am fit even to rank among one of his many disciples. If I had that fitness, I would have accomplished today what you hope I shall accomplish in the future. I am confident that there exist today in India many disciples of his who have never even seen him but who have completely mastered his teachings. People often say, what will happen when Gandhiji has gone ? I have no fear on that account. He will have accomplished by then whatever he has sought to accomplish. What remains will be for you and for me to achieve. Only if we do so, he will have no regrets. He has given us whatever he had to give, and it is up to us to do our duty.

I do not deserve the honour which you are giving me because of Bardoli. The condition of the peasants of India is akin to that of a bed-ridden patient suffering from an incurable disease, waiting only, as it were, to depart from this world and is suddenly restored to life by taking some miracle medicine given to him by a Sannyasi. I am merely the instrument through whose hands the Sannyasi administered the medicine to the patient. If anyone deserves honour, it is the giver of that medicine. Some honour is also due to the patient who carried out the strict injunctions of the Sannyasi, for without the self-control that he exercised, the medicine could not have achieved its effect. If anyone else deserves to be honoured, it is my colleagues who showed astonishing discipline, and who had complete confidence in me. It was not I who trained such colleagues. If we have such men of

whom the whole of Gujarat is so justly proud, the credit goes again to Gandhiji."

Section XVI

On the 1st of November the two members of the Enquiry Committee, the Judicial Officer, Mr Broomfield, and the Revenue Officer, Mr Maxwell, commenced their work. On the 5th, Shri Bhulabhai Desai set out the case on behalf of the people of Bardoli. After certain preliminary enquiries, the Committee started its work again on the 14th November, and completed it by the end of January in Bardoli and by the end of February in the Chaurasi Taluka. Sardar had said to the people of Chaurasi Taluka, 'If as a result of the hardships which the peasants of Bardoli are undergoing, they get justice, the benefit of that will accrue to you also.' This promise of his was fulfilled. Along with Bardoli, the Chaurasi Taluka also was given an opportunity to prove that injustice had been done to it. Inquiries were made in 50 villages of Bardoli and 20 villages of Chaurasi Taluka. The officials looked with envy upon the registers and other data which the public workers had collected. They complained that the Government had not given them the necessary assistance whereas Satyagrahis were assisted by the whole Taluka. In submitting their report to the Government, the officials of the Enquiry Committee described their relationship with the popular representatives as extremely friendly and considered the assistance given by them as very valuable. The attitude of the people, too, they stated, was far more co-operative than they had hoped.

These are the terms of reference of the Enquiry Committee:

1. The enquiry will be conducted by a Revenue Officer and a Judicial Officer. If there is any difference of opinion between them, the opinion of the Judicial Officer will be regarded as authoritative. The enquiry shall be conducted as follows:

2. These officers will enquire into and report upon the complaint of the people of the Bardoli Taluka and Valod Mahal and Chaurasi Taluka—

(a) that the enhancement of revenue recently made is not warranted in terms of the Land Revenue Code;

(b) that the reports accessible to the public do not contain sufficient data warranting the enhancement and that some of the data given are wrong;

and should find, if the people's complaint is held to be justified, what enhancement or reduction, if any, there should be upon the old assessment.

3. As the enquiry is to be full, open and independent, persons interested should be allowed to lead as well as to test evidence before the officers with the help of their representatives, including legal advisers.

4. The Judicial Officer should take part in the enquiry throughout and his decision should prevail in all matters of difference between him and the Revenue Officer.

The very first day, during the enquiries made in the village Afva, the rental statistics were found to be very confusing. For the first few days, however, it appeared as if Mr Broomfield was quite sure that agriculturists habitually spoke untruth. When he was told in one village that no enquiry was conducted there at all, Mr Broomfield remarked: "Yes, that is what the agriculturists say. All over the world, in fact, agriculturists talk in that manner." To this, the people's representatives retorted: "It is for Mr Broomfield and his colleagues to establish what the truth is." So they proceeded to examine the people. Both the Patel and the Talati said that the Settlement Officer had never come to the village. Mr Broomfield enquired if the people knew his name. To this, he received the reply: "We have heard that Mr Jayakar was the District Officer but we cannot say who he is since we have never seen him." After this incident Mr Broomfield made a point of enquiring in every village he visited whether Mr Jayakar had or had not been there, and in many places the reply received was that no one had been to the village and that no enquiry whatsoever had been conducted. On the whole, they found Mr Jayakar's figures to be unreliable, and it was on the basis of such figures that the Settlement Commissioner, Mr Anderson, had made his recommendations. Mr Anderson had stated in his report that he had himself visited some villages and examined the

leases. On enquiry, it appeared that he also had not, in fact, inspected those leases.

Gradually the enquiry officers began to have confidence in the popular representatives and were satisfied that the explanations which were being given to them were given in a helpful spirit. Instead of regarding the popular representatives as mere partisans, they learnt to regard them as colleagues, as they later admitted in their report :

> "These gentlemen, following their own methods, collected much useful material and placed it before us. They recorded a number of instances of leases and of sales. They had collected so much detailed information about each case that many a time it was possible for us to obtain true and reliable information which, without their help, we should not have been able to get. We are happy to record that this assistance, which was given to us sincerely and objectively, proved of very great value in conducting our enquiry."

At every village the popular representatives rendered accounts of profit and loss from cultivation. The enquiry officers began to be suspicious when they found that in the main these figures showed loss. In two or three villages they put the popular representatives and the agriculturists through severe cross-examination but failed to disprove the basic correctness of their testimony. The enquiry officers argued that since the agriculturists were able to lease out their lands, the lease money they received could reasonably be regarded as clear profit, and assessment might therefore well be based on lease rates. This argument is valid only if the practice of leasing out land is general. In fact, as the popular representatives were able to prove easily, only a small percentage of the land was ever leased out, and what was particularly relevant to this inquiry, the lease money was more often than not found to have been determined with reference to considerations which were not purely agricultural. The task of sorting out the pure or net lease amount from the gross figure presented difficulties at least as complex as those that had to be faced in ascertaining the true costs of cultivation. And if so much detailed investigation had to be undertaken in either case, it was sounder to try to ascertain the costs of cultivation than the lease

rates. The enquiry officers realized the force of this argument, and yet could not ignore the practical disadvantages of the delay involved in instituting a detailed investigation. They, therefore, decided to rely upon the lease rates, and hoped that they would be able to discover at least one lease deed which could be relied upon as genuine and free from other than strictly agricultural considerations. They proceeded then to discard from the lease deeds of every village anything that appeared *prima facie* to be uneconomic or unreasonable, and eventually came to the conclusion on the basis of the residual data that an increase of 6 per cent in the assessment would be justifiable. They also recommended that the assessment should be reduced in respect of certain kinds of land, such as land which could not be used for the cultivation of rice, land in which wells were disused, and land which, though traditionally regarded as garden land, was not, in fact fit to be so considered. The net effect of this was a reduction in the land revenue assessment. In a sense, the destructive part of the report was invaluable from the point of view of fixing the land revenue assessment, but the constructive part was at least to the corresponding extent weak and without any basis. They were not able to lay down any definite way of determining the land revenue. The result of this enquiry may be set out as follows :

The Government had originally fixed the increase in land revenue assessment in Bardoli and Chaurasi Talukas at Rs 1,87,492/-. The inquiry officers reduced this and fixed the increase at Rs 48,648/- so that the people benefitted to the extent of roughly Rs 1,40,000/- that is a total benefit of Rs 45 lakhs in 30 years.

In addition, they recommended : (1) that the Government should not collect any tax on wells which are not in use ; (2) that rice land which was not so used should be regarded as ordinary land ; and (3) that in villages where garden and other lands which were covered with *babul* trees and with grass should cease to be treated as garden land.

All the complaints which the people made were proved to be true and the honesty of the people, as well as of their representatives, was established before the world.

The enquiry brought out some facts very clearly :

(1) The responsible Government Officer who had been described in the correspondence with Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel as an experienced officer of the Revenue Department, had not only not made the necessary enquiries, but had made the completely false statement in his report that he had investigated lease deeds in 70 villages when he had not done so even in one of those villages. That false statement misled the Settlement Commissioner and induced the Government to think that the settlement could be based on such apparently satisfactory figures.

(2) The Settlement Commissioner did not make quite such inaccurate statements as the Revenue Officer but he also was guilty of serious carelessness. The lease deeds of the villages which he said he had inspected in the villages themselves had not in fact been investigated. For instance, he had noted that in Adajan Rs 50 had been received as lease money for 27 Gunthas of land but did not at the same time take note of the reasons for charging that amount which showed clearly that he had made no enquiries at all. Similarly, he claimed to have visited the villages of Kharad, Chhitra and Kuvadia, but the lease deeds which he stated that he had noted there, could not be found by the Committee. In other words, Mr Anderson had been almost as undependable as Mr Jayakar.

(3) The Mahalkari and Awal Karkun gave evidence which showed that the Settlement Officer had neither made personal enquiry nor carried out thorough supervision. The rent statements were prepared by the Talatis in their offices. This enquiry brought out the extent to which inefficiency was rampant in Government Offices.

(4) The prevailing method of recording details of leases was useless, as it did not give relevant data connected with each lease. The tenancy register was very unreliable.

(5) The current practice of using the lease statistics was wrong and inferences drawn from them misleading and erroneous.

This enquiry also brought out the fact that Government records could be inaccurate and misleading. As a result of this enquiry, the whole question of the method of revising the land revenue assessment in the Province became a live issue. It also gave confidence to the people in their own strength. That must be regarded as the greatest gain of the Bardoli Satyagraha.

CHAPTER XXVII

POLITICAL SITUATION BETWEEN 1925 AND 1928

At a meeting of the All-India Congress Committee in September 1925, Gandhiji had handed over the Congress organization to the Swaraj Party, and had this confirmed later at the Kanpur session of the Congress. Ever since 1922 when Gandhiji put before the country his programme for attaining Swaraj through constructive work and in particular, through his programme for Khadi and advised Congress workers to go and settle down in villages, he had begun to realize that the educated classes did not support him in this programme. On coming out of jail in 1924, he again attempted to persuade the Congress in favour of constructive village work at a meeting of the A. I. C. C. at Ahmedabad, and although he obtained a majority to support him, he felt that that majority was not a genuine majority. He, therefore, decided to stand out of active politics for a time, and to devote the greater portion of his time to the newly established All-India Spinners' Association. While most of the Congress leaders busied themselves with the Legislatures, Gandhiji continued to receive the support of Sardar, Rajaji, Rajendrababu and Jamnalalji.

Differences soon developed among the pro-legislature Congressmen. After the death of Deshbandhu Das in June 1925, the whole burden of the Swaraj Party fell on Pandit Motilal Nehru. He was a great disciplinarian and he was able to keep an effective control over his Party in the Legislative Assembly at Delhi. In co-operation with certain other non-official groups, he succeeded in inflicting defeats on the Government on some important matters. But the situation in the Provinces was quite different. In some Provinces, the Swaraj Party was not very strong and in others where it was powerful, many Congressmen felt that they could do more effective work if they accepted office under the Government, while others, who still felt that acceptance of Ministership was open to objection, favoured

serving on Government Committees. The desire to non-co-operate was fast disappearing.

At about this time there grew up within the Congress an Independence League and it endeavoured to substitute the expression "Full Independence" in the place of the word "Swaraj" among the Congress objectives. It was not as if the strength to obtain independence had increased in any way, but they wanted to make it publicly clear that they favoured a complete break from the British Empire. A proposition on these lines was put forward at the Gauhati Congress in 1926, and although it did not secure majority support then, it was accepted by the Congress at Madras in 1927. At the Madras Congress, two other important resolutions were passed. In November 1927, the Viceroy announced the appointment of a Royal Commission under the chairmanship of Sir John Simon. It was to visit India, tour throughout the country, and submit a report pointing out what progress had been made as a result of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, and to indicate the extent to which the principle of responsible government could be introduced in the Indian Constitution. As no Indian was included in this Commission, even non-Congress parties were dissatisfied with it. So far as the Congress was concerned, none of its demands was met by its appointment and the Madras Congress, therefore, passed a resolution recommending its boycott and directed that demonstrations against it should be organized at all the places that the Commission intended to visit. In addition, the Madras Congress decided to undertake the positive task of drawing up a constitution, if possible, with the help of as many of the other political parties as possible, and appointed a Committee for this purpose with Pandit Motilal Nehru as its Chairman. Incidentally, this decision of the Congress showed how unreal had been the earlier resolution, which sought to make Full Independence one of the immediate objectives of the Congress.

And so simultaneously both the Simon Commission and the Nehru Committee went forward with their respective tasks. The Simon Commission landed in Bombay on the 3rd

February, 1928. That day was observed throughout the country as a day of boycott: processions were taken out in various places and the whole country reverberated with the sound of the slogan "Simon, Go Back". The Commission travelled all over the country and finally left from Bombay on the 31st March after having, as Sir John Simon put it, "established personal relations with all the races and classes in the different parts of this country." In reality, the Commission's contact with the people consisted only in this that wherever it went there were vast masses of people moving about with black flags to express their opposition, and in many places the police had to make lathi charges to disperse them. In the Punjab Lala Lajpat Rai was hit quite severely in one such charge as a result of which he took to bed and never again rose from it. In the U. P. Pandit Jawaharlal too was beaten by police lathis. These two incidents in particular made the Simon Commission more disliked than ever.

All this time the Nehru Committee went on with its labours. In February and in March there were two sessions of the representatives of all parties. A third such session took place in May and it delegated the task of preparing the final draft of the new constitution to Pandit Motilal. At the end of August the All-Parties Conference met for the last time at Lucknow to consider the report of the Nehru Committee. It approved unanimously the concept of Dominion Status while not restricting in any manner those political bodies who had Complete Independence as their aim. Pandit Motilal insisted that the whole of the Report should be accepted, and was not prepared to agree to one part being accepted to the exclusion of another.

For the Congress Session which was to meet in December in Calcutta, Pandit Motilal's name had been put forward as the President, but he was unwilling to accept it. Sardar Patel's name as the victorious leader of Bardoli was being freely put forward, while the youth of the country was pressing the claims of Jawaharlal as the enthusiastic and young leader of the Independence League. But Bengal refused to accept anyone except Pandit Motilal as the

President. It took the view that many extremely important political questions were to come before the Congress and only an experienced politician like Pandit Motilal Nehru could assist in their solution. Finally, taking all factors into account, Pandit Motilal accepted the Presidentship, although he knew that his son as well as the vast majority of the younger generation did not favour his scheme of Dominion Status. Gandhiji took no interest in all this political controversy. He had, of course, very great confidence in Pandit Motilal and Pandit Motilal himself was devoted to him. Pandit Motilal invited Gandhiji to attend the Congress saying, "You have made me sit in the Presidential chair and put upon my head a crown of thorns; but at least do not look at my difficulties from a distance!" Gandhiji considered the Nehru Report as one of the big achievements of that year, particularly as he felt that it was something which had brought all the parties of the country together. In addition, there was, of course, what he regarded as his duty to a friend. So he accepted the invitation. Gandhiji was of the view that the Nehru Report should be put forward on behalf of the whole country as a unanimous and unmodifiable demand and that if the Government did not accept it within a definite period, the country should be prepared to give an appropriate reply. Pandit Jawaharlal, Subhas Bose and the younger section of the country were, of course, completely wedded to their ideal of Complete Independence. Gandhiji did his best to persuade them away from that course. Thinking that it might prove more acceptable to them, he suggested that the Congress resolution might take the form that the Nehru Report, being the unanimous demand of the country, was welcomed by the Congress; it should request the Viceroy to announce immediately that he would accept this demand. The Viceroy should be given two years to make up his mind, but that if he failed at the end of that time to accept the demand, the country should declare complete non-violent non-co-operation and further declare, if necessary, that the aim thereafter would be Complete Independence. But Pandit Jawaharlal felt that it was impossible to wait even for two

minutes and was, therefore, quite unwilling to accept the proposed postponement for two years. Gandhiji's argument was that our objective was, of course, independence, but we had to work in order to achieve it. The most important thing was work. Jawaharlal's reply was that while he realized the importance of work, the most important thing in preparing people's minds was to put before them the right objective. Moreover, the Complete Independence Party disliked the idea of going to the Viceroy with any request. The two points of view hardened to such an extent that there was definite apprehension that the Congress would again be split. In order to avoid such a split, Gandhiji removed from his resolution the portion relating to the request to the Viceroy and reduced the period for acceptance from two to one year. The Complete Independence Party was appeased by these modifications, and the modified resolution was passed by a large majority in the Subjects Committee of the Congress. But the very next day it became known that the Complete Independence Party was not really satisfied by this compromise. Its leaders felt that they had committed a mistake in accepting it. Subhas Bose had accepted the compromise but without any genuine faith in it ; and so before the ink was dry on the resolution Subhas Bose changed his mind and gave notice to the President that he will oppose the resolution in the full session. Gandhiji was very greatly disturbed at this vacillating attitude of the adherents of the Complete Independence objective. As the Complete Independence Party had gone back on the compromise, Gandhiji could have gone back to his original resolution, but he did not do so and put before the Congress the resolution in its modified form.

Subhas Bose proposed an amendment to the effect that nothing effective was possible without a complete break with the British, and Pandit Jawaharlal supported the amendment. Gandhiji was deeply pained, and after speeches had been made in support of the resolution and against it, he gave expression to his feelings in a simple yet eloquent form :

"This Nehru Report is the work of our leaders. The work

was undertaken in compliance with the decisions taken at the Madras Congress. The Government has had nothing to do with it, and whatever its name, it contains a definite step towards independence. But I wish today to speak to you of self-respect and honour. Any country which gives up its honour, its pledges and its regard for truth, is unfit for independence. To me it is most painful to note that you are giving up today a resolution which you accepted yesterday as a compromise. My resolution was quite different, but in order to please the young men I accepted the compromise knowing full well how far I could go. Subhas Bose says that by this resolution of Dominion Status the old men have combined to lower our flag of independence. If that is what you think, why do you not remove the President and find another President who will hold aloft your flag? If you think that I am lowering your flag, condemn me. I too am old. I have lost my teeth. In 1920 I was gold; now I am brass. If that is what you believe, you should kick me out. But to me this is a question of honour. You talk in one breath of independence and in another you break your given word. How can that be tolerated?"

He then went on to warn the Bengali youth:

"If you think perhaps that this Baniya is unable to understand your feelings you are mistaken. If you feel that you did wrong in compromising, and if you think that in accepting it you committed a sin, you must do penance for it. But that penance does not consist in amending the resolution. If you think that your mistake is only one of thought, it behoves you to admit that you made a mistake, but not to sacrifice your honour. I do not mind if you defeat me, but you break my heart when I see you thus compromising your honour and your sense of what is right. To you slavery has become unbearable, so is it unbearable to me. To me, however, what is even more unbearable is this tainted atmosphere of disunity, absence of restraint and incompetence. To you also it should be similarly unbearable. If you were to purify yourselves, if you were to learn discipline, if you were determined to carry through the constructive programme, the achievement of Independence would be an easy matter."

It was midnight before the voting took place and the counting of votes was completed. Gandhiji's resolution was passed by a large majority. It was the responsibility of Pandit Jawaharlal as the Congress Secretary to see that the counting of votes was done properly. No attempt had been made by Gandhiji's followers to secure a majority, while the Complete Independence Party had made great efforts to secure votes in their favour. For a moment the atmos-

phere in the Congress was ruffled and disturbed. When Jawaharlal saw that some young men were trying to cheat in the matter of votes, although they belonged to his party, he lost his temper and did all he could to prevent malpractice. Rajaji, Sardar and other colleagues of Gandhiji urged Gandhiji not to press his resolution. Their view was that even if the resolution received the support of the majority, it would not be possible to do very much if it was not acceptable to any large section of the people. But for Gandhiji it had become unbearable that any important part should go back on its plighted word. He therefore insisted on going forward with the resolution.

Amidst these squabbles in the Congress Session, there was a pleasant interlude. The President moved a resolution congratulating those who had participated in the Bardoli Satyagraha. The resolution was moved by the President as it was a non-controversial matter. As soon as the President had read the resolution, the audience wanted that Sardar should get up and show himself. Rather reluctantly the Sardar stood up in his place but the people were not satisfied with that and insisted that he should be brought up on the platform. When the Sardar declined he was forcibly pushed to the platform. For many a minute the place resounded with cheers. Sardar thanked the audience briefly in Hindi :

> "I thank you for having congratulated the peasants of Bardoli. If you are genuinely appreciative of what they have done, I hope that you too will follow in their footsteps."

When this resolution came up for consideration in the Subjects Committee the reference was made to Vallabhbhai as "Sardar Vallabhbhai". To the Independence Party the idea that a title should thus be conferred on anyone, even if it was a title conferred by the people themselves, was not acceptable, and so they insisted that "Sardar Vallabhbhai" should be substituted by "Shri Vallabhbhai". Sardar himself was not present in the Subjects Committee, otherwise he would have supported the amendment himself. But when he heard this he said with genuine delight that the Congress was doing right in depriving him of his Sardarship.

Thus in the Congress of 1928 were laid the foundations of the Satyagraha Campaign of 1930. It is difficult to say if the people who insisted on their resolution of "Complete Independence" realized its implications. The Independence Resolution had already been before the Congress more than once and had indeed been passed by the Congress Session in Madras in 1927, and those who had passed the resolution then had given no further serious thought either by preparing plans for implementing it or by doing anything else positive towards it. The resolution which Gandhiji had put forward now included a clause that if by the 31st December 1929, the country did not get a constitution on the basis of the Nehru Report there would be direct action. Gandhiji, Sardar and others began immediately after the session to make preparations for it.

CHAPTER XXVIII

1929 — THE YEAR OF PREPARATION

While the Bardoli Satyagraha was in progress, a Society was organized to do propaganda in the Surat District and in the neighbouring Indian States against intoxicating drinks. Sardar was the President of this Society and Mithubehn Petit, its Secretary. Nowhere else in the country had the evil of alcoholism and toddy drinking taken as deep a root as in the Surat District. During the Bardoli movement itself a good deal of progress was made towards non-drinking of intoxicants, and after the Satyagraha was over, all the workers of the District devoted the greater part of their attention to this task.

One consequence of this activity was to bring new life into the depressed communities of Raniparaj * and Kolis * of the District. As the propaganda against drinking gathered momentum, there developed also resentment against the system of free or compulsorily cheap labour, which was being imposed on the Raniparaj people by the Parsi land-

* Two of the backward class groups in this part of the country.

owners. It was but natural that the latter should be annoyed at this inroad into what they had come to regard as their special privilege and they physically assaulted those who were working for non-drinking of intoxicants. Sardar used to go now and again to the meetings of these backward class communities. When he heard of these physical attacks on his workers, he began to move about more freely and continuously in this area with a view to arousing greater spirit among the poor people. When he learnt that some officers of Baroda State, who were opposed to prevention of drinking of intoxicants, were helping the Parsis, he warned Baroda State :

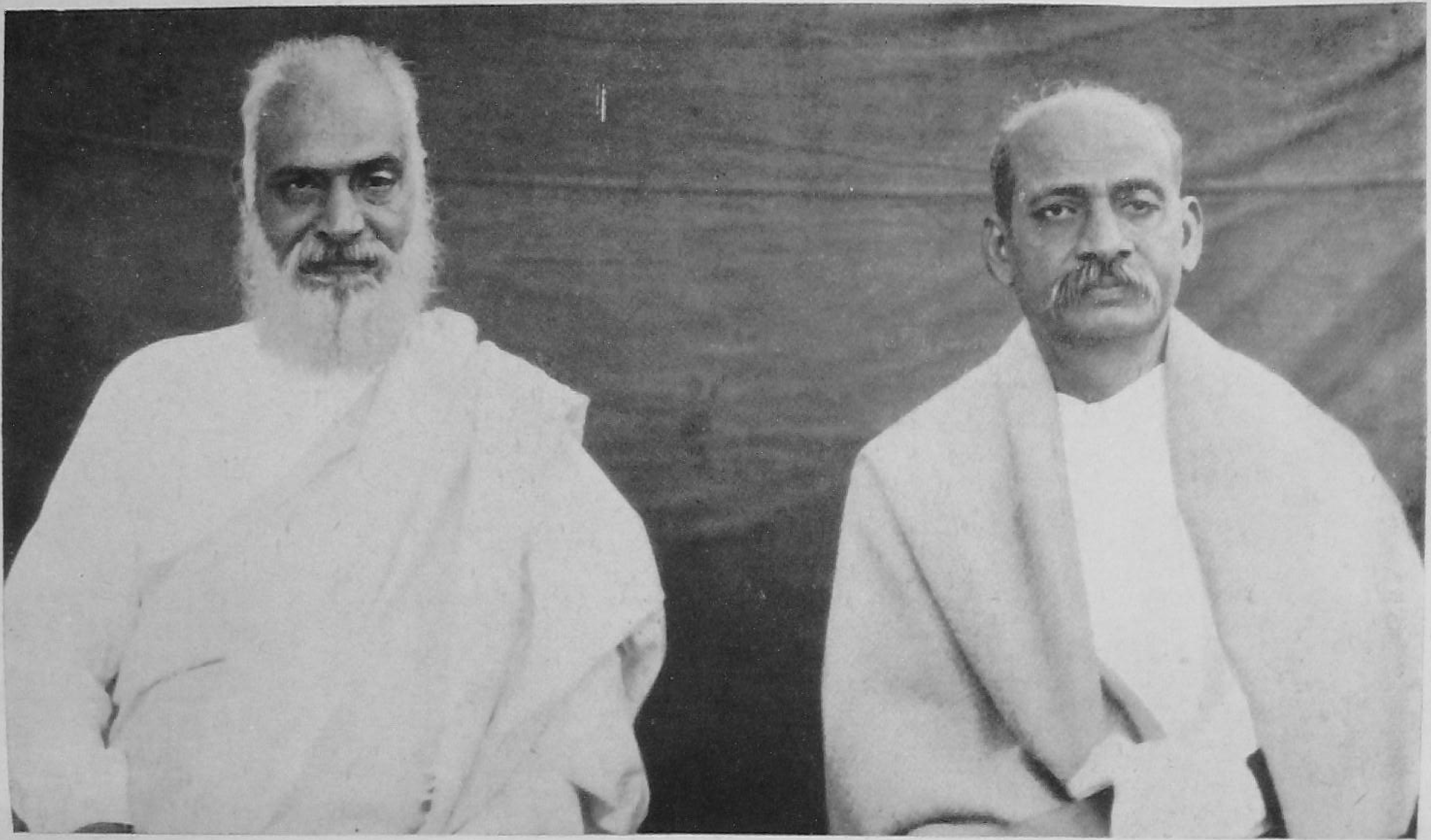
> "I have no quarrel with your State ; my field of action is elsewhere ; I do not know when I shall finish fighting the British, but the effect of the awakening in the British part of India is bound to be felt in Baroda, and, therefore, you would be well advised to deal with your people fairly and with sympathy and to stop your officers from supporting the proprietors of liquor shops."

To the humble Raniparaj population the Sardar advised : "You should not be afraid of beating and any other form of harassment, but should resist such ill-treatment and protect yourselves even if you have to attack your opponents." Sardar felt it to be wise to give advice of this nature to people to whom fear had become almost second nature. When they had learnt to be strong, then would be the time for teaching them non-violence. Till then, to make them brave, the wiser course was to advise them to resist force with force.

In April a big Raniparaj Conference was held in the village of Unai which is one of their places of pilgrimage. In his address to them, Sardar said a few words regarding the excise policy of the State :

> "Here at this point, the boundaries of Baroda and Vansda States meet. From the palace of the Ruler of Baroda to the poor man's cottage, drink has played havoc. How then can there be happiness and peace in the State or among the people ? I hear the ruler of Vansda is a good man. But he cannot face the prospect of his income from excise going down. Mahuda* is his

*A tree from the blossom of which intoxicating liquor is made.



The Two Brothers Who Fought Many Battles and Won

God and no other. Those States which do not have faith in God, cannot but wonder what would happen to their revenue, if people gave up drink." He went on then to warn the States: "These States are afraid of our activities against drink. I do not understand why they are so afraid. I consider it beneath my self-respect to fight these States. These tiny States could be conquered with ease even by a band of Dharalas †. Why should I waste my time fighting such States? Our duty is to fight the British Empire. Let these States remember, however, that if their officers harass the people, we will not put up with their tyrannical conduct."

While the Broomfield-Maxwell Committee was still at work, Gujarat had another misfortune. Heavy frost one night caused widespread damage to crops throughout Gujarat: the cold was so intense that in some places even trees were damaged. Sardar urged the Government through the *Navajivan* to postpone the recovery of land revenue:

"Last year Gujarat saw floods such as had not been seen before and this year it has seen cold and frost such as it had never before experienced. From all corners of Gujarat come heart-rending accounts from the agriculturists that their valuable cotton and tobacco crops, their vegetable and their fruit trees have been completely destroyed; even hard trees like the babul have suffered damage. The loss suffered by the agriculturists has been incredible. The agriculturists find this calamity even more difficult to bear than the flood of the previous year; for, this time the blow has been incredibly sudden and swift, their crops on which they had spent a great deal of money and effort and which were ready for harvesting were destroyed in one night. It was almost as if God had snatched away a mouthful of food just as it had reached the mouth. To ask for land revenue at a time like this would be the height of cruelty. I hope that the Government will treat the peasants of Gujarat generously. To the Gujarat peasants I would advise that whatever the difficulties they are called upon to face, they should not lose hope. It may be that God is only testing us; if so we must take steps to face yet further climatic disasters."

In addition to the damage caused by frost, serious loss had been brought about in several parts of Ahmedabad and

† A backward class of people who once owned considerable amount of land and are now largely landless, hot-tempered and courageous, and rather too ready with their deadly multi-purpose weapon.

Kheda Districts by swarms of locusts. In the correspondence which the Sardar had with the Collector of Kheda, the latter admitted that the people had suffered great loss and that he would do his best to give the fullest possible relief, but that he was waiting only for estimates of the crops from his Mamlatdars. When, however, Government orders for relief were announced they were found to be totally inadequate. Mr Maxwell who was a member of the Bardoli Enquiry Committee was at the time the Revenue Member of the Bombay Government, and Sardar wrote to him requesting him to put before the Governor his view that it was absolutely essential that maximum possible relief should be given to the peasants of Matar and Mehmadabad Talukas, for without such assistance the peasants would be completely ruined. Although there was a very clear case for full postponement of revenue, Sardar felt that in view of the forthcoming bigger battle, it would be unwise to divert people's attention towards a smaller conflict, and so he sought to secure what relief he could through persuasion.

In March, Sardar was invited to preside over the fifth Kathiawad * Political Conference. As usual he did some plain speaking. He said :

> "If this Conference does not have the support of the public, all its work would be in vain. When we say something it must have strength behind it. Merely to speak ill of the Rulers will not help. There is no instance in the world of any ruler having been defeated by just slander; that the ruler can afford to ignore. If you wish to influence his actions, you must get close to him and you must serve the State. Today we run away from the ruler, and while we expect from him all manner of things, we do not do anything ourselves. That is not the way in which we can serve either the ruler or the people."

Then he went on to state the limitations imposed by one's own condition, one's strength and one's circumstances :

> "You hope for much from me because a short while ago I was able to do something in Bardoli, which you thought inspiring and worthwhile. But may I be frank ? Although I live in British India where restrictions on speech etc., are far fewer than in Kathiawad, I do not like making public speeches ; indeed, too much

* Kathiawad is now known as Saurashtra.

talk does more harm than good. What Kathiawad needs today is to speak less and if at all it has to speak, to know clearly before speaking what to speak. One can only serve you if you are determined to improve yourselves. For that reason, I must, in the friendliest manner possible, tell you what is your principal defect. If I had the sweetness of tongue which you have I could have done that task very much better. But I am a peasant and from birth I am accustomed to speaking bluntly. I must first of all ask you to learn to distinguish between politeness and flattery. I am neither old nor young but have reached a point where youth and old age meet. I still feel attracted by the impetuousness of the young, but experience, which comes with age, has taught me restraint. The inspiration which I derive from the enthusiasm of the youth I try to moderate by the experience of age. He who laughs at his elders really throws away his ancestral legacy. Wherever I go in India, I hear cries of rebellion; but I have never heard of rebellion being initiated by those who merely shout, however loud. It is the silent workers who carry out revolutions. They hold their spirit in control and only let it have its way when it is necessary to do so.

"Many call me a blind devotee of Gandhiji. I wish that in fact I had the strength to become his blind devotee but that, alas, is not the case. I claim to have average intelligence and understanding. I have seen something of the world, so it is not likely that I would follow this half-naked person like a mad man or without any understanding. I was a member of a profession in which I could perhaps have become rich by misleading many, but I gave up that profession, for I learnt from this man that that was not the way in which I could do good to the peasants. I have been with him almost since he came to India, and so long as I live and he lives, that relationship will continue. Even so, I keep him away from my work. We are not likely to regain our capacity for initiative and independent action, if we merely look to him for leadership and wait for his guidance. How can we hope to achieve anything if we are always dependent upon assistance from someone? When he was ill in Mysore, many people sent him telegrams urging him to come to Gujarat for flood relief work. He enquired of me whether he should. I told him that for ten years he had been advising Gujarat, and that if he wished to see whether Gujarat had assimilated his advice, he should not come to Gujarat. In the same way, I told him to go to Bardoli only after I was arrested. Our chief defect is lack of discipline and organization. We do not know how to be soldiers. We have not accustomed ourselves to carrying out orders. In this age of individual independence, we have mistaken licence for liberty. India's troubles as also those of Kathiawad do not spring from shortage of leaders. There are

far too many of them. What we need are soldiers and may God give to the youth of Kathiawad the moral strength to be good soldiers."

Until now Sardar's activities had been very largely confined to Gujarat. As a result of Bardoli, the public of other provinces, and in particular the peasants, were specially attracted towards him. About this time, the Government of Bombay had announced its proposals for increasing the land revenue assessment in several Talukas of Deccan, such as Baglan, Malegaon, Vasai, Palgadh, Devgadh etc., and so when it was decided to hold the Maharashtra Political Conference, Sardar was invited to be its President. With great reluctance, and under Gandhiji's pressure, he accepted the invitation. In his Presidential address Sardar dealt mainly with the land revenue question which was the topic of the day. Although Maharashtra had started a campaign against the proposed increases in land revenue, the various schemes which her leaders had devised for fighting the Government were all somewhat unpractical. Commenting on this, Sardar said :

"It seems to be the tendency in your part of the country to advise the cultivators either to pay to the Government a rupee less than the fixed land revenue or not to pay the increase in the assessment. The object of such advice is presumably to save the poor peasant from the hardship which you think he would have to undergo if he did not pay the whole of the land revenue. But there is one grave defect in this advice. No one takes you seriously. If the whole basis is unjust, how can you say that only the increase is unjust. It would be, tactically and even otherwise, more effective to maintain that not merely the increase but the entire assessment is unjust, and to refrain from paying anything. I would suggest that we should not give any thought to financial or material losses. If we wish to transform our peasants, who have become servile, into bold men, we must instil in them the capacity and the desire voluntarily to make sacrifices and suffer hardships."

He went on then to speak of the arbitrary nature of the increases proposed in various Talukas :

"In spite of the two protest resolutions passed by the Legislature, increases go on being made in Taluka after Taluka. A committee was appointed to determine the manner in which land revenue should be assessed, but the majority recommendations of that committee were ignored by the Government, and instead it

accepted the advice of a group of officials of the Revenue Department. The official mind dislikes the very idea of the public questioning the fairness of any land revenue arrangement, and if we want to make them realize that that is a wrong approach, we must take a firm and determined stand."

After his address, the Executive Committee met. In Gujarat in such conferences, the task of framing resolutions was ordinarily completed fairly quickly but in Maharashtra the position was very different. Here one had to deal with very subtle brains fond of discussion. Even so Sardar was able with his sense of humour to persuade everyone to get on rapidly with the business in hand. Both the public workers of Maharashtra and the ordinary people liked his way of handling the discussion very much. When, for instance, a member enquired if with a Khadi coat, one could wear a mill-made *dhoti* instead of a Khadi *dhoti*, Sardar's immediate rejoinder was "Certainly, if the person connected would agree also to the right only to half a vote." In the course of a discussion on the meaning to be attached to a resolution in which was used the expression 'regular use of Khadi' someone enquired: "If a person wears Khadi everyday, but if for some reason on some day he put on something else, would it be wrong, nevertheless, to consider him as a regular wearer of Khadi?" Sardar replied: "I know of only one principle. If a coin is given to me, I test it in the usual way, and if it makes a hollow sound, then so far as I am concerned, it is hollow." In the resolution on untouchability, there occurred the words "Untouchability is a blot on the Hindu religion." The learned Maharashtrians were greatly agitated over these words, and one of them enquired: "How can you say that it is a blot on the Hindu religion?" Sardar replied: "Do you suggest then that it is a blot on Islam or on Christianity? If you say so, we shall have it stated accordingly." In this way he got through his work in a pleasant but businesslike way.

In his final *ex tempore* summing up, he made some telling points:

"Maharashtra is quite different from what I had imagined it to be. It is necessary to combine with Maharashtra's capacity for sacrifice, her devotion to duty and her culture, the practical

business sense of Gujarat. When there was need for a Shivaji, God sent us Shivaji; when a Lokamanya was necessary, he was given to us. Today when in order to fight these businessmen's kingdom, we need a leader who is a businessman, God has sent us Gandhiji. We have all fallen into a big pit, and there is only one way of coming out of it. If we keep pulling each other down, we shall only remain where we are. You reject Gandhiji's advice because you consider it to be unpractical, a Sadhu's advice. I am not a Sadhu. I do understand the practical aspects of life. I am not the type of person to give up my home and hearth and sit quietly with folded hands. But I know this, you cannot achieve success by just committing murders in a haphazard manner, or throwing bombs here and there. You must plan and organize. Where have we the resources of strength to use violence in an organized manner? If we had the strength and the resources, I am sure you are not so simple as to listen to Gandhiji even for a day and do nothing. Many say that Gandhiji has misled people in talking so much about Hindu-Muslim unity. I say that those who allow themselves to be beaten by Muslims are merely blaming Gandhiji for their own cowardice. Gandhiji has never advised anybody either to be cowardly or to run away. Indeed his advice has always been: stand up for your rights and face death or resist your enemy. If you have any strength, fight and prove it. But it is not the way of the brave to stab someone in the back."

Finally, he referred to the time and effort that would be required to prepare for offering non-violent Civil Disobedience. Instead of getting on with these preparation, the country had got itself enmeshed in legislative elections on the one hand and on the other in the controversy on 'Complete Independence' and 'Dominion Status'.

"Today there is no hope whatever of getting either Independence or Dominion Status. Why is neither today a possibility? Because instead of trying to climb out of our pit, we are quarrelling among ourselves. It would be something to get up even half the way. Let anyone who wants to go ahead do so. I like the impatience of your young men, but how much nicer would it be if this impatience manifested itself in actual work? Obviously, you cannot hope to start a revolution, just by platform speeches and shouting revolutionary slogans. Therefore, let us give up all controversy and slogans and get on with work."

A Land League was established to organize agitation against further increases in the land revenue assessment rates in the whole Presidency. Men of all parties joined this organization which was concerned only with an economic

issue of vital significance to the Peasantry. Sardar was elected President of the League, with Mr Kelkar, as one of the Secretaries, while several members of the Servants of India Society * joined as members. The League contended that the task of determining the level of land revenue assessment should be taken away from the revenue officers who tended to look upon the whole question merely as one of securing an increase in the land revenue. The question of land revenue policy, they held, should be examined afresh. Pending this inquiry, the assessment should be frozen at their existing levels, except that in Talukas which were recognized to be particularly poor, the assessment should be reduced, even during this interim period. Thus, in Gujarat the Matar Taluka had been ruined mainly as a result of the very heavy land revenue burden imposed on it. The Gujarat Vidyapith carried out an economic survey of this Taluka, which proved conclusively by facts and figures the extreme poverty of the people of this Taluka. The Government agreed eventually to appoint a special officer, and following his recommendations, the assessment was reduced by 25 per cent.

Until now it would seem that Sardar's ambition was to confine his activities to Gujarat and to prepare it thoroughly for the mass civil disobedience which was shortly to be started. Bardoli, however, had made him an all-India figure. His success at the Maharashtra Political Conference added to his reputation. Soon after the Conference, Rajaji pressed him to visit Tamil Nad and inculcate in its peasants, the spirit of Bardoli. He urged Sardar to accept the Presidentship of the Tamil Nad Political Conference which was to be held at the end of August at a place called Vedaranyam, at the extreme south of the Presidency. Sardar was again reluctant to accept the Presidentship. Rajaji, however, persisted and sought Gandhiji's assistance. The entire Tamil Nad, he said, was looking forward to

* A band of people pledged to serve the country in a constitutional way. This society was organized by the great Maharashtrian, G. K. Gokhale.

Sardar's visit and he must come. Again, as in the case of the Maharashtra Conference, Gandhiji took the upper hand and made up Sardar's mind for him.

Just before the Conference, Sardar visited Rajaji at his Ashram. While he was there, a large group of people came to the Ashram and started talking angrily with Rajaji. The talk was in Tamil, so Sardar was not able to follow it. Rajaji, for his part, appeared to take it all in good part, but when the people left, Rajaji explained to Sardar that the neighbouring villages had come to the conclusion that rainfall had failed during the last 4 or 5 years because he had been misleading the 'untouchables', removing the barriers of caste, and generally destroying the foundations of our religion. They were faced with drought and famine year after year, and in spite of it had to pay revenue assessment every year. To overcome these afflictions they had decided at last to boycott him and his Ashram!

After arriving at Vedaranyam, Sardar sought to win over Srinivasa Iyengar, who was perhaps the most vehement supporter of the idea of 'Complete Independence' to the proposition that they might let things be for four months or so till the Congress met again in Lahore. According to the *Young India* of 12-9-'29:

"Vallabhbhai had made no secret of the fact that he regarded the resolution as not only contrary to the spirit of the Calcutta resolution, but that he regarded it as unnecessary, and although he ultimately agreed to preside, he had hoped that he would not be placed in the unenviable position of having to divide the province on a futile issue. But his hopes and requests were of no avail. He found that the Conference had been called on the set purpose of passing that resolution, and he had to perform the most painful duty of giving his warning to the Conference in the most unmistakable terms. He adverted to the inconsistency of the proposition with another resolution of the Provincial Committee, as also with the compromise arrived at in Calcutta. He also pointed out that the resolution was unnecessary and premature. 'I have not come to do anything prejudicial to the prestige of your province, I have not come to sow seeds of discord,' he said. 'But having come I should be failing in my duty if I did not tender my advice. There is time enough for you to prepare. You may yet make yourselves so strong that when your opinion comes to be placed before the Lahore Congress, it might be irresistible. But

until then, please wait and implement the Calcutta resolution. That resolution provides not so much for a change of creed in a particular contingency as for a particular programme of work. Your creed can have no meaning without a programme. Get ready if you can for that programme.' He did not know what effect his warning would have on the delegates who had listened to numerous speeches on either side with rapt attention. When, however, the vote was taken, it was found that an overwhelming majority rejected Srinivasa Iyengar's proposition. It was not an overwhelming majority opposed to Independence and supporting Dominion Status. The issue was not there before the Conference. The issue was whether the existing creed came in the way of the country carrying out the national programme, and if it did, whether it should not be scrapped. The Conference accepted the advice of its President that there was nothing wrong with the creed, and that if we were no nearer the goal, it was because we would not bestir ourselves but kept on talking. In his concluding address he sounded a clarion call to the country, and the effect appeared to be electric."

From Vedaranyam Rajaji took Sardar all over the Tamil Province. In Madras he had to speak in practically every college. Sardar disliked speaking in English, and had made no effort to develop his ability to speak in English. Even so, and despite the occasional grammatical errors that crept into his speech, the Madras public, which appreciated good English, found his speeches eloquent and attractive. His words seemed to them to spring from the depth of his heart ; they were so simple and forthright that they went right through to the listeners' hearts. His language was like lava flowing from a volcano, so full of wrath and vigour. Another characteristic of his speeches was that he quite openly said whatever he thought was the right thing to say, without worrying about its effect on anybody or anything. The main theme of all his political speeches during this tour was to emphasize the futility of mere resolutions which did not have the backing of constructive work :

"The programme which had been placed before the country and which inspired us to dream extraordinary dreams, which made us believe for a moment that Independence was almost within our reach, that (constructive) programme which had created such a high moral atmosphere in the country that people were literally apprehensive of committing sins and doing wrong, that programme was suspended. Then a new programme (council-

entry) was placed before the country which has now been before it for six years; that has not helped us to move forward even one step; it has only led to a plethora of disputes and factions in the country and the whole atmosphere has become sinister and impure. Those who went into the Legislature with the object of smashing it have themselves been smashed by that Legislature. Today in your Province people are talking of nothing else but going into the Legislature and taking office; they talk of turning out one party and taking its place. And yet in the same breath they talk of independence! The Government is not so simple that it can be deceived by them. For heaven's sake, let us forget our quarrels for a year and unite so that we can get the land revenue system altered. Today your leaders are shouting for independence, but not one of them seems to think of the work that has to be done in order to achieve it. Everyone is anxious to make Gandhiji the President, but no one wants Gandhiji's spinning wheel. If you think he is mad, are you not mad yourselves when you suggest his name for Presidentship? But he is not mad. His practical sense and knowledge of the world is far greater than yours or mine, and believe me, we shall all adopt his ways, if not today, tomorrow."

In those days, the Brahmin-non-Brahmin controversy was at its height, and Sardar thought it necessary to say a few words on that subject to the non-Brahmins:

"Why are you so envious of Brahmins? What harm have they done? Do you not know what harm those other "Brahmins" (the British) have done both to you and to these Brahmins? Those people have come from 5,000 miles to rule in this country and have become the real Brahmins. They have no caste and yet both you and the Brahmins worship them as if they were Brahmins. Morning and evening you go to offer your prayers to them. Do you not want to fight those Brahmins? Do you not wish to stop them from treating you as slaves? Or do you prefer them to the Brahmins of your own country? Let us assume that your own Brahmins have done harm to you; have they, however, done you as much harm as these other Brahmins? And why do you regard these overseas Brahmins as better than yourselves? The man who cultivates land and grows foodgrains is to my mind the most important in this world. I belong to that community. So do you. How then are you inferior? When even a man so great as Ramanuja made a non-Brahmin his Guru; when you see so many of the most learned of Brahmins stand humbly in front of a non-Brahmin like Gandhiji, why are you troubled over the so-called superiority of Brahmins?"

At another place, again addressing the non-Brahmins he remarked :

"You are out to destroy. But if you do not have the strength to put something in the place of what you destroy, for heaven's sake pause and think again. You may not want a Brahmin to conduct your marriage ceremony, but surely you want some 'qualified' witness of a solemn ceremony. Do you not realize that if you destroy all ritual and custom, any scoundrel could abduct a respectable person's daughter and produce half a dozen hired witnesses to swear that the girl was his wife ? What would you do then ?

The non-Brahmins had never before been spoken to in so frank a manner and they had no answer to such questions. It had a sobering effect on the non-Brahmin community, though their press was infuriated. An old peasant was so enchanted by Sardar's speeches that he followed him wherever he went. "Never before have we seen anyone who has understood our difficulties and our troubles as this man, and never before have we seen anyone with his capacity for explaining things in so simple a manner to us and making us see realities ", he observed.

On his way back from Tamil Nad, Sardar was pressed by Gangadhar Rao Deshpande to stop for a couple of days in the Karnatak. He had started establishing Peasant Leagues in the Karnatak and wanted Sardar's assistance in the furtherance of that work. He had arranged 10 meetings for the two days Sardar was to spend travelling from Dharwad to Belgaum. It would seem that in the Karnatak as in Maharashtra, there is a convention which regulates all formal meetings. No matter what the object of the meeting, there must always be at least 6 speeches by local speakers : two to propose and second the motion for the chairman of the meeting, two to propose and second thanks to the speaker of the day, and finally two to thank the chairman. In addition, of course, on occasions such as Sardar's visit, there was a formal address which was read at first in Kanarese and then translated into English. And if in a meeting there happened to be a sizeable Maharashtrian audience the address would have to be translated into Marathi also. Then there was the ceremony of presenting

garlands. Each different group in the audience would want to present its own garland, and there would be disputes as to which group should present its garland first! If there were only one such programme during the day, no great harm was done. But where arrangements had been made to hold 10 meetings in two days, the practical difficulties of adhering to such a programme could be imagined. Realizing this, Sardar took matters into his own hands, and cut short much of the formalities.

In the villages among the peasants the meetings were far more orderly and disciplined than in the towns, where there were often all manner of unseemingly quarrels and controversies over procedure! Everywhere Sardar exhorted the people to shed their fear of Government officers, of forfeitures and of jails, and urged them to give up foreign cloth, alcoholic drinks and law courts. At one meeting the Sardar asked the peasants: "Your representatives go to the Legislature and fight amongst themselves; and when they come out, they encourage you to fight among yourselves. How long do you propose to let them fool you thus?" He advised the peasants to tell these leaders to join the Peasants' Leagues, and if they did not do so, to ask them for their reasons. "If they are reluctant to join, believe me it is because they are afraid of the Government and are in fact supporters of the Government. Ask them then: 'Do you wish to look after Government's interest or ours?'"

In the frank and forthright language of Sardar, Gangadhar Rao seemed to hear the echoes of his Guru Tilak Maharaj. He seemed to see in Sardar's eyes the same brightness and impatience that was visible in Lokamanya Tilak's eyes. When Sardar was once speaking in Tamil Nad, Rajaji remarked that it was almost as if Tilak Maharaj was speaking. Mahadevbhai claimed that it was he who had first made this discovery. In his book *Vir Vallabh*, he brings out the points of resemblance between Sardar and Tilak:

> "On close association with Vallabhbhai and after watching his manner of speech, his smile and his laughter, his anger and his impatience, one cannot but be reminded of Tilak Maharaj. Both of them created an impression regarding themselves which

was the exact opposite of what they in fact were. Both appeared at first sight to be arrogant, and stand-offish whereas in fact they were humble and gentle. Both gave the impression of being very complex, obstinate and stern, whereas in fact they were simple, straightforward and friendly."

Mahadevbhai admits at the same time that in making this comparison he did not, of course, overlook the profound learning of Tilak Maharaj. But as he says:

"Tilak Maharaj became Lokamanya not because of his deep learning, but because of his wonderful ability to fight against injustice, because of his great sacrifices, because of his amazing ability to get at the root of people's troubles, and because of his ability to touch their hearts. Gujarat discovered during the Bardoli fight that all these qualities existed in Sardar to no less an extent. When Lokamanya stood in front of the public he did not parade before them his wisdom and his learning, but spoke to them in the language of the common man. If we look at the many speeches that Sardar made at Bardoli, we shall find in them the echoes of those historic speeches which Tilak Maharaj made in Ahmednagar and Belgaum."

In December, Sardar went on a fortnight's tour of Bihar where he received tremendous welcome as the first pupil of Gandhiji. In Tamil Nad too, Sardar had received very warm reception, but in Bihar the reception he received reflected the great devotion of Biharis to Gandhiji. Just as in Champaran, Gandhiji had come to their assistance, so the peasants of Bihar felt that this disciple of Gandhiji might save them from their troubles, and thousands upon thousands of peasants flocked to hear him wherever and whenever he spoke.

The great misfortune of Bihar was its zamindari system, which enabled the zamindar to live a life of leisure and luxury on the earnings of the peasant's labour. The gap between the poor and the rich was immense. The peasants were just a mass of down-trodden cringing humanity, who suffered numerous injustices and hardships at the hands of the zamindar. And then there was the system of purdah not merely between men and women, but between women and women. Sardar talked on how to remove these evils. As Rajendra Babu was ill, the arrangements of this tour were

in the hands of Babu Anugrah Narain Sinha *. Every effort was made for Sardar to meet as many peasants as possible. In Monghyr a Provincial Conference was arranged, besides District Conferences in Champaran, Sitamarhi and Gaya. At each of these Conferences and in other meetings Sardar spoke in Hindi, and although it was interspersed with Gujarati words, what he said was understood by the people.

At one place, he urged them to shed fear :

"The history of Champaran will constitute the first and the most important chapter in the history of Indian Independence. You, who made that chapter, should fear nothing. Your faces, however, do not show that you are the people who carried out that Satyagraha. You see the results of that Satyagraha. There are no longer any Europeans on the Indigo Plantations. There is not a trace of that unjust tax which they had imposed. And yet you have not cast off your fear, and just as a bullock gets frightened at the sound of a car, so are you frightened as soon as any officer of the Government or of the zamindar approaches you. Have these men got two heads or four hands? Should they be afraid or should you? You are the people who give food to the world. You live by the sweat of your toil and not merely that, it is on the results of your toil that most others live. The world cannot do without you and if the world cannot, much less the zamindar.

"The peasant does not belong to the third or the last estate but to the first estate. The rest are parasites. He is the food-giver. If he was idle the whole world would starve. His is also comparatively the purest life in the world. Character always depends on whether a man works for his own bread or works others for his bread, and the peasant is the least dependent among all mankind. I resent the description of the peasant as a 'poor, wretched creature'. No, if any one has the right to walk with his head erect on earth, it is the peasant. Why should he bow his knee before any one, be he a zamindar or an officer of the Government? Let them bow to him without whom all of them must starve.

"I have not come to bless you but to swear at you. You who had the honour of having Mahatmaji in your midst before any other province had that privilege, you who belong to a province where Mahatmaji lived longest during recent years, you do not seem to have deserved that honour. The tyrannous hand of the planter is no more there to strike you dumb, and yet you are like dumb-driven cattle. Day in and day out you are full of

* At present the Finance Minister of Bihar.

complaints against your zamindar, but do not bestir yourselves to give him a good shaking. You shake and tremble before him, though you know that he has not even a tenth of your physical strength. What has made of you such helpless miserables? You toil and moil for the zamindar and yet have not enough with which to fill your empty stomachs. Make a determination to cease to be down-trodden beasts and you have Swaraj.

"How came this middleman between you and the Government? I do not see any place for him. In Gujarat we have no such middleman. He may be called a zamindar here, but the *zamin* (land) does not belong to him but to you who cultivate it. You and your forefathers have been cultivating it from time immemorial. The zamindar never cultivated it. Then why should he have such unlimited powers of disposal over the land? And why should he enjoy the privilege of a permanent settlement and you be subject to an inevitable enhancement every fifteen years besides other exactions? The first thing therefore is to teach him a lesson by refusing to produce more than you need for yourselves and your family. Even a bullock refuses to work until he is given sufficient to eat. No one has a right to deprive you of a square meal thrice a day. Insist first on that. Arbitrary exactions are out of the question in the present age. The Champaran Satyagraha sounded their death-knell and if they still persist they simply cannot be tolerated. Next as to *malguzari* or land revenue, I am convinced that there is no room anywhere in India for an enhancement of the existing rates of land revenue, whether the ryots hold land from the zamindar or from the Government. On the other hand, there is reason everywhere for considerable reductions. And so organize yourselves, meet your leaders and get them to negotiate with the zamindars. No tenancy legislation is going to help you. You must rely on your own strength, and if the zamindars do not come to terms refuse to cultivate for them. The Bardoli peasants had no arms, no physical strength, to use against the Government. But they had the moral strength to refuse what they thought was an unjust enhancement. They therefore simply refused to pay and took the consequences. I want you to cultivate the readiness to say 'no' to the zamindar and the courage to take the consequences. And for that, as I have already said, the first and the last requirement is fearlessness.

"Why are you afraid of death? Is the zamindar immortal? One has to die but once, but it is neither for the Government nor for the zamindar to say when you are to die. That is in the hands of God. Why are you afraid of jails? Indeed you will be happier inside there than you are outside. Here nobody gives you medicine or milk in order to keep you alive. There in the

jail, if you fall ill they will give you milk; they will give you medicine; and if you are well, they will make you do some work and give you three good meals. Why should you become the slave of the zamindar? Why should you obey his orders? You grow your food and learn to eat it happily. Develop strength; develop unity; stand as one; get your demands fixed by wise leaders and insist upon the zamindars accepting them. If they do not, tell them that you will not give them a single pie or a single grain by way of rent or assessment."

Speaking on purdah, at another place he said:

"Are you not ashamed that you keep your women behind a purdah? Who are these ladies? Your mothers, your sisters, your wives. Do you really believe that only by keeping them behind purdah, you can look after their chastity? Who are you to distrust them in this way? Or is it that you are afraid that if they came out they would see your own slavery and have nothing more to do with you, you who have yourselves kept them like slaves? In Bardoli I told the people that if they did not let me speak to their womenfolk, and let them talk to me freely, I would have nothing to do with their Satyagraha. The women understood at once and started attending the meetings, and in a very short time, in the meetings there used to be at least as many women as there were men. Go home and tell your women what I am telling you now, and say a peasant from Gujarat has come to tell us that if you women do not come out, we shall never be happy. If I could I would say to these ladies: Rather than be wives to such cowardly husbands, divorce them.

* * *

"And do you know why you are reduced to the state of beasts? It is because you have kept your women back. How can our women be trusted to be pure outside the purdah, you seem to think. You distrust their capacity of protecting themselves and their honour and you have turned them into fear-stricken animals afraid of their own shadows. Do not forget that you are their progeny. You are born of those very creatures whom you love to keep 'cribbed, cabined and confined'. And there is no wonder that you are no better than beasts. And what better proof can be found of the fact that you love to be in that state, than the unseemly scenes we see all around us wherever we go? I see in towns and villages palanquins carrying babes and sucklings whom the brutes of their parents describe as brides and bridegrooms. Thanks to the Sarda Act, I am told, thousands and thousands of such children will be sacrificed at the nuptial altar. I tell you, if I had the law in my own hands, I would make it a rule to shoot every father and mother and priest who is responsible for such mock-marriages. We hear in some quarters the

cry of 'Religion in danger'. Religion is certainly in danger when ignorant, brutal priests and parents are vying with one another in inflicting these so-called marriages on society. The Brahmin who in the name of religion misguides people and gets them to marry children of tender age is no Brahmin but a monster. You *kisans* (peasants), who have become willing victims to the tyranny of the zamindar and the Brahmin, do not deserve the name of *kisans*. The *kisan* is the master producer. He must be brave, he must be strong, he must be fearless, manly and virile."

And to the young men who loved shouting slogans regarding revolution, Sardar said:

"First of all show that you have the ability and the strength to carry out a revolution before you shout victory to revolution. What is the good of asking others to shout victory for something which is not in existence? In your province a revolution did in fact take place in Champaran and it is because of that revolution that you became known throughout the length and breadth of this country and abroad. The peasants understand the meaning of that revolution. So if you need any new slogan at all, shout victory to the Champaran Satyagraha. That will move the peasants as nothing else will move them. But what is all this nonsense about revolution that you are talking? You have effected no revolution in your own lives. You adhere as much to the old customs and superstitions as anybody else. You haven't the courage even to break through the custom of purdah; you have not effected any revolution in your schools and colleges. In what other slogan do you have the same inspiration as in the slogan "Mahatma Gandhiki jai", for indeed Mahatmaji is revolution personified."

Thus, until the time came for the Lahore Congress, did Sardar prepare the people for the great battle.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE "COMPLETE INDEPENDENCE" RESOLUTION

The Lahore Congress Session in December 1929 was faced with some very important and vital problems. Even Pandit Motilal had lost his faith in the value of working through the Legislatures, and had come round to the view that Congress Legislators should send in their resignations. But then what was to be the next step ? Which of the two objectives should be accepted ? Dominion Status or Complete Independence ? But whichever the objective, the only way in which it could be achieved quickly was through Civil Disobedience. That being the case the elder leaders felt that Gandhiji was the only right person to lead the Congress. Ten provinces were in favour of Gandhiji presiding, five were in favour of Sardar and three were for Jawaharlal. But Gandhiji refused to be President. The younger generation wanted to make Pandit Jawaharlal the President. At the All-India Congress Committee Session in Lucknow at the end of September, after hearing everybody, Gandhiji said he regretted his inability to accept the Presidentship. He was of the view that he would be able to serve the country better otherwise. It was an illusion to think that only if he became the President, certain things would happen. The Government was not so foolish that it will adopt a particular policy if he were the President and another if someone else was the President. If someone was unwilling to accept the Presidentship, no matter how great or big he might be, we should not get into the way of thinking that we could not get on without him. After this, there was no question of urging Gandhiji further to accept the Presidentship. Then Sardar's name was put forward, but he too declined the honour. That left only Pandit Jawaharlal and he was accepted unanimously. Commenting on this election, Gandhiji wrote in the *Young India* :

"Now the decision lies in the hands of the young men of the country. This is the year of the awakening of the

youth. They played a big part in the successful boycott of the Simon Commission. Jawaharlal's selection as President may well be regarded as the recognition of the services of the youth. But let not the young rest on their oars; we have a long way to go yet. Jawaharlal by himself can do but little. The young men will have to become his hands and feet, his eyes and his ears. May the young men prove themselves worthy of this confidence."

Lord Irwin who had gone to England for discussions with the British Cabinet returned to India on the 25th October. On the 31st of October he made a statement in which he said that His Majesty's Government wished to meet representatives of British India and of Indian States to ascertain their views on the final recommendations of the Simon Commission, before the recommendations were submitted to the Parliament. The leaders of Liberal and other parties were satisfied with this announcement, and they laid particular stress on the fact that the Labour Government was in power in England at the time. Sir C. P. Ramaswami who had just then returned by air from England expressed the view that the Secretary of State for India was sincerely anxious to see India independent and that India should give him her full support. Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru also expressed the view that if India did not seize this opportunity, she would make a big mistake. Gandhiji put forward four conditions on the acceptance of which alone he was prepared to advise the Congress to participate in the discussions, namely: (1) All the political prisoners should be released; (2) It should be clearly stated that the Conference was called not for discussing as to when Dominion Status was to be given, but to discuss its scheme and constitution; (3) The Congress should be regarded as the principal representative party; (4) Whatever it was intended to give after the Conference should be given straightaway so that the people might begin to feel that an era of Independence had already begun. The new constitution would then be merely the recognition of a settled fact.

Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru welcomed these conditions and prepared a statement on those lines which later became known as the "Joint Manifesto". In commenting on the Manifesto, Gandhiji said that to him the form of the

Constitution mattered little if only Dominion Status were conferred in practice straightaway, as that would indicate a real change of heart on the part of the British :

> "It would arouse in the British themselves a desire to see India free and independent early, and inspire their officers with a desire to serve the country. It would mean that they would begin to trust us rather than their armies and weapons. If they do not, I at least would not be very happy with Dominion Status. What I understand by Dominion Status is that if I wish to break off the British connection today I should have the right to do so. There should be no compulsion in that connection. I do not think that I have strained the language unduly in interpreting the "Joint Manifesto" in this way. But even if the Manifesto cannot bear this interpretation, I consider it my duty to tell India's friends in England what I consider to be the really vital thing."

The Viceroy's announcement had not promised anything very much. It nevertheless led to a great deal of agitation in England, and what the Secretary of State said in Parliament in explanation disappointed everybody in India. An All-Party Conference was called at Allahabad on the 16th November to consider this explanation. The Congress Working Committee meeting was also convened to meet there at the same time. Pandit Jawaharlal and Subhas Bose were disappointed with the Congress for being taken in by what they regarded as an empty statement, and in order to emphasize their objection, they resigned immediately from the Working Committee.

Realizing the trend, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru arranged that the Viceroy should meet Gandhiji and Pandit Motilal on the 23rd of December in the hope that some agreement might be achieved before the Lahore Congress met; a meeting was arranged on the 23rd December. The Viceroy was to return from South India to Delhi that same day. When he was a mile from New Delhi a bomb exploded underneath his train. The Viceroy escaped injury, though his dining saloon was damaged and a servant was hurt. In spite of this shocking experience, the Viceroy met the leaders who had been invited to the conference, Gandhiji, Pandit Motilal, Jinnah, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and Vithalbhai Patel. For quite three quarters of an hour the conversation

hovered round the incident of the explosion. Then the Viceroy enquired: "How shall we start? Shall we take up the question of the release of prisoners?" Gandhiji replied that the work of the conference must proceed on the basis of complete Dominion Status. On that point we would welcome your assurance. The Viceroy said that the Government's position had been clarified in the statement which he had already made. Beyond that he could not promise anything, nor was he in a position to issue invitations to the conference on the basis of a definite assurance of Dominion Status. This answer, however, unsatisfying, was clear and definite; there was no point in further discussion and the meeting soon came to a close.

So far as the Congress was concerned, it was now clear that there would have to be a desperate and unrelenting fight; and it was under an atmosphere of considerable tenseness that the Lahore Congress was held a few days later under the Presidentship of Pandit Jawaharlal. It unanimously approved the resolution of Complete Independence:

"This Congress endorses the action of the Working Committee in connection with the Manifesto signed by party leaders, including Congressmen, on the Viceregal pronouncement of the 31st October relating to Dominion Status, and appreciates the efforts of the Viceroy towards a settlement of the national movement for Swaraj. The Congress however, having considered all that has since happened and the result of the meeting between Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Motilal Nehru and other leaders and the Viceroy, is of opinion that nothing is to be gained in the existing circumstances by the Congress being represented at the proposed Round Table Conference. This Congress, therefore, in pursuance of the resolution passed at its session at Calcutta last year, declares that the word 'Swaraj' in Article I of the Congress Constitution shall mean Complete Independence, and further declares the entire scheme of the Nehru Committee's Report to have lapsed, and hopes that all Congressmen will henceforth devote their exclusive attention to the attainment of Complete Independence for India. As a preliminary step towards organizing a campaign for independence, and in order to make the Congress policy as consistent as possible with the change of creed, this Congress calls upon Congressmen and others taking part in the national movement to abstain from participating

directly or indirectly in future elections, and directs the present Congress members of the Legislatures and Committees to resign their seats. This Congress appeals to the Nation zealously to prosecute the constructive programme of the Congress, and authorizes the All-India Congress Committee, whenever it deems fit, to launch upon a programme of Civil Disobedience including non-payment of taxes, whether in selected areas or otherwise and under such safeguards as it may consider necessary."

Thus, the Lahore Congress threw out the challenge. In anticipation of the big conflict to come, in which it would be necessary to sacrifice everything, Sardar disposed of his house in Ahmedabad. It was, of course, a rented house, but he felt that he should be free of all responsibility. He was to treat the whole of India hereafter as his house. After the Bardoli Movement, he had become particularly fond of the Bardoli Ashram, and whenever he was in Gujarat, he used to make that Ashram his headquarters. From the beginning of 1930 to the end of 1934—five years of the struggle—Government prisons became in a way his home, particularly as during this period the Bardoli Ashram itself was seized by the Government. Thereafter Sardar lived but too infrequently in Gujarat and was almost all the time on the move, travelling on public business in different parts of the country.

INDEX

ABBAS TYABJI, 108, 153, 158, 178
Ahmedabad Congress (1921), 145-50; its specialities, 145-46
Ahmedabad Labour, 94
Ahmedabad Municipality, decides not to accept Govt. (Government) grant for primary education, 129; in, new Committee set up to administer primary education, 140; is able to acquire land for widening city streets, 133-34; is reinstated in February 1924, 142; its fight with Education Department over appointment of 300 teachers, 132-33; its programme of work, 168-69; its Schools Committee takes over from Govt. inspection & examination work of Municipal Schools, 130; rejects Govt. control over its education, 37; suit filed against, by Govt., 143; suspended in February 1922, 139
Ahmedabad riots (1919), 102
Ajmal Khan, Hakim, 99, 147, 175, 179
Ali, dacoit of Borsad, 218, 223, 235, 240
All-India Congress Committee, 263-66; appoints Civil Disobedience Inquiry Committee, 171; invites volunteers for Nagpur Satyagraha, 193
Ambalal Sarabhai, 91, 276, 277
Anand Taluka, ready for C. D. (Civil Disobedience), 152
Anderson, 299-301, 364
Ansari, Dr., 175, 179
Azad, Abul Kalam, 179
BABAR DEVA, dacoit of Borsad, 216-18, 221, 223, 226-27, 233-34
Bajaj, Jamnalal, 184; arrested for Nagpur Satyagraha, 188
Banker, Shankarlal, 98; arrested in 1922, 165; represents mill-workers, 90
Bardoli, C. D. suspended in 1922, 161; is selected for mass C. D. in 1922, 150; ready for C. D. (1922), 152, 156-58
Bardoli Enquiry Committee, 332, 342, 360, 363; its findings, 367; its recommendations, 366; its terms of reference, 363-64
Bardoli Satyagraha (1928), 297-367; both Press and politicians support, 351; in, arrests begin, 326; in, attachments of cattle begin, 323; in, butchers are called for buying buffaloes, 323; in, Govt. begins seizures, 321; in, Gujarat legislative Members resign, 332; in, houses are closed on Govt. officers' arrival, 321; in, not a single act of violence, 352; in, people decide to shut themselves & cattle inside houses, 324; is ended, 359; its case reg. arguments of Jayakar's & Anderson's reports, 301-02; its land revenue assessment is increased by 30%, 298; its Patels & Talatis resign, 337; its preparations, 307; reasons for increase of revenue assessment, 298; resolved upon, 306; two defaulters in, do penance, 314

Bhagat, chief officer of Ahd. (Ahmedabad) Municipality, 275-77
Bharuch, holds Conference for Bardoli, 347
Birkenhead, Lord, 164
Bombay Government, appoints Garret as flood-relief officer, 296; issues statement reg. Borsad. 231; its terms for Bardoli settlement, 350; sanctions loan for flood-stricken people's houses, 290
Bombay Presidency Political Conference, is held at Ahd. (1916), 26
Bonfire, of foreign cloth throughout India, 122
Borsad Satyagraha (1923), attachment work in, begins, 228; Conference, 226-28; gist of preliminary inquiry, 216-19; in, Mamlatdar issues forfeiture notices, 230; in, people organize defence against attachment work, 229-30
Bose, Subhas, 371
Broomfield, 363, 364

CENTRAL FLOOD RELIEF COMMITTEE, 290
Central Provinces Government, issues statement reg. National Flag, 191; its propaganda against Flag Satyagraha, 194-96
Chandavarkar, Sir Narayan, 113, 114
Changers, 179
Chauri Chaura riots, 159-60
Chauthai, 85, 86
Civil Disobedience, as civilized and effective as armed rebellion, 149; Enquiry Committee publishes report (November, 1922), 148, 175, 178, 297
Complete Independence Resolution, 397-98
Constructive Programme, 257

DAS, DESHBANDHU, 107, 108, 174, 266, 368; arrested before Ahd. Congress, 147; establishes Swaraj Party, 178; on Round Table Conference, 128; on talks of a settlement with Lord Reading, 181; speaks in Gaya Congress in favour of council-entry, 176-77
Das, Vasanti Devi, started pro-legislature propaganda, 170
Desai, Bhulabhai, 363
Desai, Chandubhai, Dr., leads Gujarat volunteers to Nagpur Flag Satyagraha, 197
Desai, Harilalbhai, 26, 27
Desai, Mahadevbhai, 185; describes Bardoli negotiations, 355-59; on V's (Vallabhbhai's) Bardoli leadership, 318-19; proposes preparation for C. D., 187; quotes samples from V.'s speeches, 318-19
Desai, Morarji, 276
Deshpande, Gangadhar Rao, 184
Dominion Status, 396, 397
Dyer, General, 109

FLOODS (July, 1927), in Gujarat & Saurashtra, 280-85; relief in, 286-87
Foreign cloth, its boycott, 151

GANDHI, MAGANLAL, undertakes to build a new village of Vithalpur, 293
Gandhi, M. K., advises India not to launch C. D. before he tries it in Gujarat, 151; arrested in 1922, 165; asks India to boycott Prince of Wales, 126; defines jail-going as complete Swaraj, 147; despatches letter to Viceroy reg. Bardoli Satyagraha (1921), 159; emphasizes people's efforts have achieved success, 154; establishes A. I. Spinners' Association, 267;

exposes fallacy of Govt. position, 342-43; fasts for Ahmedabad riots, 102; fasts for Bombay riots, 153; fasts for Chauri Chaura, 161; fasts for Hindu-Muslim unity, 266; fasts in Ahmedabad labour strike, 92; gets a true picture of strength of untouchability in Kutch, 125; greets V. as king of Borsad, 257; hands over Congress to Swaraj Party, 368; his appeal reg. Gujarat flood relief, 293-94; his message for Khadi, 167; his message for Mohammed Ali, 185; his suggestions reg. relief work, 295; is appointed sole dictator for C. D., 149, 154; member of the Punjab Enquiry Committee, 107, 108; on basic principles of non-co-operation, 263-64; on breach of compromise in Calcutta Congress, 372-73; on constructive programme in Borsad, 259; on Deshbandhu's arrest, 147; on judgment of High Court reg. disqualifying non-co-operating barristers, 105-06; on legislatures & non-co-operation, 262; on limitations of boycott, 315; on non-co-operation, 124; on reasons for Kheda Satyagraha, 72; on V., 89; on V.'s leadership of Gujarat during his absence in 1922-24, 258; released in 1924, 257; replies Birkenhead & Montagu, 165; replies Commissioner reg. Bardoli, 330; returns medals to Viceroy, 110; says he would be a law-resister if farmers are deprived of land, 81; supports Swaraj Party being a wing of Congress, 266-67; takes up Kheda District question, 62

Gaya, its Congress Session resolves upon boycott of legislatures, 178

Gopaldas, Darbar, 230; decides to remain in Borsad, 259

Gujarat Political Conference, 36, 43, 44; supports non-co-operation, 110, 170

Gujarat Provincial Congress Committee, its flood relief work is praised by Viceroy, 289, 292; passes resolution reg. Borsad Punitive Tax, 225-26

Gujarat Sabha, 41-47, 60-61, 64; its Secretaries meet Pratt reg. Kheda revenue affair, 56-58; writes to Govt. reg. Kheda revenue, 54

Gujarat Vidyapith, 115, 171, 272, 287; carries out economic survey of Matar Taluka, 383; its students in Bardoli Satyagraha, 348

HARDIKAR, Dr., 196

Hunter Committee, 107; its report, 109

INDEPENDENCE, 116, 148, 154; within a year, 118, 150

Independence League, wants a complete break from British Empire, 369, 372

Indian National Congress, its Constitution framed in 1920 continued up to 1947, 117; its Nagpur Session, 117; its special Delhi Session, 184; specialities of its Constitution, 117-18

I. N. Congress Working Committee, at Surat, 159; entrusts V. with conduct of Nagpur Satyagraha, 200; passes resolution for Bardoli, 332

Individual Satyagraha, 151-52

Irwin, Lord, meets Indian leaders, 395

Iyengar, Srinivasa, 384

JAIRAMDAS DOULATRAM, 333

Jayakar, 108, 298, 301, 364; his report is discarded by Anderson, 300
Jhaverbhai, V.'s father, 4-6

KALELKAR, KAKA, 187, 259
Kanuga, Dr., 104, 173
Kelkar, N. C., 179, 347, 383
Kheda, applies for postponement of recovery of land revenue, 50; experiences a green famine, 48; has largest number of criminal offences, 13
Kheda Satyagraha, 48-89; is terminated, 86
King Emperor, donates Rs 2,000/- for Gujarat flood relief, 289
Kunzru, Hridayanath, 346

LABOUR STRIKE, of Ahmedabad, 90-94
Ladbai, V.'s mother, 6
Lajpat Rai, Lala, 184, 369; is shocked at the withdrawal of C. D. 162
Lalji Narain, resigns from Legislature for Bardoli injustice, 345
Land owner, is only a land holder according to British rulers, 80
Legislatures, their boycott, 150
Local self-government institutions, their difficulties, 277-80

MADRAS CONGRESS, accepted ideal of Independence, 369; resolves to boycott Simon Commission, 369; resolves upon direct action in 1930, 375
Maharashtra Political Conference, 170
Malaviyaji, Pandit, 107, 108
Mavlankar, Dadasaheb, 31, 32, 145, 254; on V., 22-24
Maxwell, 363, 378
Mehta, Chunilal, 289, 295, 356, 360; praises V.'s flood relief work, 310-11
Moderates, 120, 169
Mohammed Ali, on Gandhiji's message, 184
Munshi, K. M., 343, 358; extracts from his letter on Bardoli Satyagraha, 343-44; undertakes judicial examination of Govt. repression in Bardoli, 344; urges Bombay Governor to intercede in Bardoli Satyagraha, 342

NADIAD MUNICIPALITY, refuses Govt. grant & control for primary schools, 134; suit filed against, by Govt., 144
Nagpur Flag Satyagraha, 189-215; how it originated, 189-90; its jail, 198-99; its procession is allowed to pass, 206; its Satyagrahi prisoners released, 210; its settlement, 204
Naidu, Sarojini, 43, 98, 181
Nehru, Jawaharlal, 126, 163, 370; is elected President of Lahore Congress, 394; is in favour of settlement between No-changers & Pro-changers, 180; on Gandhiji, 163
Nehru, Motilalji, 368; favoured council-entry, 174-75; is elected President of Calcutta Congress, 371; is shocked at withdrawal of C. D., 162; on Bardoli Satyagraha, 346; prepares Constitution on the basis of Dominion Status, 370; Secretary of Swaraj Party, 107, 108, 179
No-changers, arrive at settlement with Pro-changers in 1923, 179; intend to prepare the nation for C. D., 179
O'DWYER, SIR MICHAEL, 109, 349

PANDYA, MOHANLAL, 49, 216, 225; as 'onion-thief', 88; settles in Baraiyas & Patanwadias, 246

Parikh, Gokuldas, 51, 59-61

Parikh, Narharibhai, 255

Patel, Dahyabhai V., 251, 255

Patel, Manibehn V., 123, 251; becomes care-taker of her father, 255

Patel, Vallabhbhai, admires Sahajanandswami, 4; adopts Khadi in 1921, 123; advises Bardoli people to exert extreme patience, 328; advises Bardoli people to stop down drum-beating, 325; allows Vithalbhai to go to England, 251; and Rajenbabu accepted Gandhiji's decision reg. suspension of Bardoli C. D., 163; answers C.P. Government reg. Flag Satyagraha, 203-04, 213-14; appears in riot cases of 1919, 106; argues futility of Legislatures, 180; arranges correction of disorders in Ahd. Water Works, 33-35; becomes President of Land League, 383; begins practice at Godhra, 12; believes leaders ought to mould people, 27; belongs to caste come from Punjab, 5; Chairman, Reception Committee of Ahd. Congress, 1921, 145; chooses Bardoli for C. D., 154-55; comes in possession of a secret Govt. circular reg. Ali, 223; congratulated for Bardoli success, 361-62; continues practice till end of 1919, 25; corresponds with Pratt reg. forced labour, 44; decides to be Gandhiji's second in command of the first unit of recruits, 97; decides to keep away from public life & earn only money, 22; decides to lead Bardoli Satyagraha, 303; declares himself against council-entry, 177; determines to keep Gujarat organizations working out constructive programme efficiently, 168; disposes of his house as a preparation for Satyagraha, 398; dissuades impatient workers from immediate C. D., 188; engages himself in constructive & Municipal work, 267; explains boycott to Bardoli people, 322; exposes Deshbandhu's tactics, 181-82; exposes Govt. communique, 335-36; exhorts Bihar peasants to shed fear, 390; finishes quotas of Gujarat & Saurashtra reg. Tilak fund, membership & spinning wheels, 118-19; given to religious fasting, 4; helps his brothers, 250-51; his contribution to foreign cloth bonfire, 122; his domestic life, 249-56; his fine for Ahd. riots realized, 104; his leadership of Gujarat is unquestioned, 167; his letter to Mahadevbhai on Nagpur Satyagraha crisis, 208-09; his letters written from England, 251-52; his love for agriculturists, 320; his love for children, 255; his Municipal work, 272-74; his presidential address at Local Self-Government Conference, 277-80; his relations with his children, 253; his relations with Vithalbhai, 183; his religious-mindedness, 7; his schooling, 8-10; his skill as a bridge-player, 25; his special qualities at bar, 13-14; impeaches Government reg. Borsad, 237-38; introduces in Kutch two members of Gandhiji's party as Harijans, 124-25; is compared with Tilak, 389; is elected as Municipal President, 268; issues appeal for help for flood-striken Gujarat, 282;

issues statements to extremists & moderates, 354-55; leads anti-Rowlatt Act procession in Ahd., 100; leads a strike in school, 10; leaves for England, 18; loses his wife, 16; makes Ahd. Municipality efficient in administration, 273; makes Ahd. Municipality reject Govt. grant to Municipal schools & Govt. control over Municipal education, 37; neither supports nor opposes council-entry resolution at Delhi Session, 186; offers his services to Gandhiji for Kheda Satyagraha, 55; offers his terms for Bardoli settlement, 350-51; on arbitrary nature of increases in revenue, 380; on Brahmin-non-Brahmin controversy, 386-87; on C. D. for a definite though limited objective, 188; on futility of political violence, 382; on his early days, 11; on Indian & Western cultures, 121; on initial situation of Nagpur Flag Satyagraha, 200-01; on Maharashtra's public virtues, 381-82; on people's insanitary habits, 270; on purdah, 392; on repression in Gujarat in 1921, 148; on revolutionary slogans, 393; on settlement in Delhi Session, 185-86; on supreme need of constructive work, 188; on what Independence would ensure, 121; opposes resolution of Complete Independence in Kakinada Congress, 257; organizes constructive work in Bardoli Taluka after 1922, 297; organizes famine & influenza work in Ahd., 46; organizes foreign cloth picketing, 171-73; passes pleader's examination at 25, 11; persuades villagers to accept responsibility for assisting Government in searching thieves, 248; played important part in re-establishing peace in Ahd. in 1919, 101; presides over 5th Kathiawad Political Conference, 378; presides over Raniparaj Conference, 376; presides over Tamil Nad Political Conference, 383; prohibits in Bardoli other people from making speeches, 323; proposes Ahd. Municipality should give up Govt. grant and reject its control over primary education, 129; provides solution of Ahd. water problem, 38-39; reads for 12 hours every day for Bar, 19; replies Bombay Govt. on being called 'outsider', 309; replies Bombay Govt.'s statement reg. Borsad, 232-37; replies Vithalbhai, 182; represents mill-workers, 91; requests Bombay Govt. for help from Famine Relief Fund, 288; resigns from Ahd. Municipality as a President, 277; resigns from Working Committee, 181; returns to India as a Bar-at-law, 21; shoulders Nagpur Satyagraha leadership, 188; signs manifesto inviting soldiers & civil servants to non-co-operate, 124; starts movement against forced labour in villages, 45; starts relief operations, 283; starts with Gandhiji for recruitment, 94-97; succeeds in dispute with Ahd. Cantonment people, 272; sums up conclusion of Nagpur Satyagraha, 210-12; takes up Borsad Punitive Police tax question, 219; tours in Bihar, 390-93; tours in Karnatak, 387-89; undertakes to meet Vithalbhai's expenses in England, 15; warns Bardoli people against being soft, 308, 313; warns C. P. Govt. reg.

resumption of Flag Satyagraha, 209; warns those who purchase forfeited lands of Bardoli, 338; withdraws Borsad Satyagraha, 242-44
Patel, Vithalbhai, 9, 12, 19, 43, 51, 59, 60; comes to Nagpur to secure help for Flag Satyagraha, 200; commences inquiry in Bardoli, 156-57; favoured council-entry, 175; goes to England in place of Vallabhbhai, 15; pays monthly donation to Bardoli, 337; proposes appointment of Civil Disobedience Committee, 171; runs to help Gujarat relief work, 292
Phadke, Mama, 259
Pratt, 45, 134
Prohibition Society, with V. as President, 375
Punjab atrocities, 102-03
Purushottamdas Thakurdas, 345

RAJAJI, 177-79, 256, 384; asks Kakinada Congress to reaffirm adherence to non-co-operation, 257; favours no-change in non-co-operation, 175; on constructive work, 178
Rajendra Prasad, 179, 184; on council-entry in Delhi Congress, 185
Ramanbhai, Sir, 26, 27
Ravishankar Maharaj, 198, 225; presides over Thakore Conference, 259; settles in Baraiyas, 246; starts inquiry in Borsad, 216
Reading, Lord, 127
Riots, on 9th April 1919, 100
Round Table Conference, 98
Rowlatt Act, 97-99

SAPRU, SIR, 346
Setalvad, Chimanlal, 105
Shivdasani, 155
Simon Commission, 267, 369, 370
Sundarlal, Pandit, 189
Surat Members' draft, 356
Surat Municipality, 134, 139, 140, 144
Swaraj Party, 178-79, 261-62; opposes Nagpur Satyagraha, 199-200

TANDON, PURUSHOTTAMDAS, 181
Thakkar, Amritlal, 52, 346
Tilak, Lokamanya, 82, 97, 167
Tilak Swaraj Fund, 119, 150
Times of India, 194, 207-09, 223, 311, 317, 348

VADILAL HOSPITAL, 150
Viceroy, 180, 292

WINTERTON, LORD, 349

YAJNIK, INDULAL, 98, 187

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